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A DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARY
Edited by the Rev. A. R. BUCKLAND, M.A.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST MARK

X. 32—XIII. 37

A DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARY

By the

Rev. J. D. JONES, M.A., D.D.

Author of "Elims of Life," "The Way into the Kingdom," etc.



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CONTENTS

	PAGE
I.	
ON THE WAY TO JERUSALEM	9
Mark x. 32-34.	
II.	
THE SONS OF ZEBEDEE	19
Mark x. 35-40.	
III.	
GREATNESS IN THE KINGDOM	31
Mark x. 41-48.	
IV.	
BLIND BARTIMÆUS	42
Mark x. 46-52.	
V.	
THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY	55
Mark xi. 1-10.	
VI.	
THE BARREN FIG-TREE: DIFFICULTIES	68
Mark xi. 11-14.	

Contents

	PAGE
VII.	
THE BARREN FIG-TREE: MESSAGES	78
Mark xi. 12-14, 20-25.	
VIII.	
THE CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE	89
Mark xi. 15-18.	
IX.	
PRAYER AND ITS POWER	100
Mark xi. 22, 23.	
X.	
THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS	108
Mark xi. 27-33.	
XI.	
THE WICKED HUSBANDMEN	120
Mark xii. 1-12.	
XII.	
THE TRIBUTE MONEY	133
Mark xii. 13-17.	
XIII.	
THE LIFE OF THE WORLD TO COME	147
Mark xii. 18-27.	
XIV.	
THE RESURRECTION	158
Mark xii. 26.	

Contents

PAGE

XV.

THE GREAT COMMANDMENT	167
Mark xii. 28-34.	

XVI.

“ GREAT DAVID’S GREATER SON ”	177
Mark xii. 35-37.	

XVII.

THE GREAT INDICTMENT	188
Mark xii. 38-40.	

XVIII.

THE WIDOW’S MITES	200
Mark xii. 41-44.	

XIX.

THE LAST THINGS	212
Mark xiii.	

NOTE

The quotations at the head of Chapters are from the Authorised Version. Quotations in the body of the Commentary are mainly from the Revised Version.

I

ON THE WAY TO JERUSALEM

"And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem ; and Jesus went before them : and they were amazed ; and as they followed, they were afraid. And He took again the twelve, and began to tell them what things should happen unto Him, saying, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem ; and the Son of Man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes ; and they shall condemn Him to death, and shall deliver Him to the Gentiles : and they shall mock Him, and shall scourge Him, and shall spit upon Him, and shall kill Him : and the third day He shall rise again."—MARK x. 32-34.

A WORD as to the exact chronological position of Mark x. this journey to Jerusalem. Mark's is, as you all 32-34.

know, the briefest of the Gospels, and we are not to conclude that incidents that follow one another in the narrative necessarily came immediately the one after the other. For the sequence of events, we must compare Gospel with Gospel. Now, as far as I can judge from a comparison with the other Gospels, and especially with St John, several notable events had happened since the incident of the rich young ruler and the subsequent conversation, and, amongst them, the raising of Lazarus from the dead. That astounding and overwhelming miracle had caused immense excitement, with the result that the Sanhedrim met together and deliberately resolved that

The Sequence
of Events.

St Mark x. 32—xiii. 37

**Mark x.
32-34.**

they would put Christ to death. Jesus got to know of their resolution, and, inasmuch as His hour was not yet come, He departed into a city called Ephraim, about twenty miles to the north of Jerusalem. There apparently He remained for some time, until, indeed, His Passion drew nigh. Then of His own free will He journeyed back, to face His foes and meet His death. That is the exact point in our Lord's career to which this paragraph brings us. He is setting out on His last journey to Jerusalem. His hour has struck. It is no longer the hour for flight and concealment. It is the hour to go forth and drink the cup and bear the cross and die.

**The Manner
of the
Going.**

What a journey that was ! Never in all human history was ever so wonderful and subduing a march undertaken as this ! The wonder of it, the awe of it, smote those who witnessed it with amazement and fear. Look at Mark's vivid account, " And they were in the way, going up to Jerusalem ; and Jesus was going before them." Usually, our Lord walked along in the very midst of His disciples, but on this last march He strode in front of them, He " was going before them." " And they were amazed," not simply because the action was unusual ; there was about the attitude and appearance of Jesus that which filled the Twelve with wonder ; " and they that followed," i.e. the larger crowd that always hung about the steps of Christ—the multitude that pressed upon Him and thronged Him—" they that followed were afraid."

**The Obedient
Christ.** I am not surprised that the disciples were " amazed," and the multitudes were " afraid " ; for surely the

On the Way to Jerusalem

sight of Jesus marching on to Jerusalem is an awe-inspiring sight. What a glimpse we have here of *the obedient Christ!* Obedience, from one point of view, is the key to the life of Jesus. It was the explanation He Himself gave of His conduct and actions. "Wist ye not," He said to His earthly parents, "that I must be about My Father's business?" (Luke ii. 49). "I am come down from heaven," He said to the multitude, "not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me" (John vi. 38). "We must work the works of Him that sent Me," He said on another occasion, "while it is day; the night cometh, when no man can work" (John ix. 4). All through His life Christ submitted Himself absolutely and without reserve to the Father's will. He spoke the words the Father gave Him to speak. He did the works His Father gave Him to do. And there was no limit to His obedience. He shrank from no sacrifice or pain. He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

What a glimpse, too, we have here of *the heroic Christ!* He knew to what He was going. Not one item in the bitter tragedy of the garden and the judgment hall and the cross escaped Him. And yet deliberately and willingly He faced it all. The courage of the soldier on the battlefield—wonderful as it often is—pales beside the courage, the majestic and overwhelming courage, of the Son of God marching to the cross. The soldier faces wounds and death, but can always hope to escape them. There was no escape for Jesus. It was to death He marched, to a cruel death, to a shameful and bitter

The Heroic
Christ.

St Mark x. 32—xiii. 37

Mark x. death, and yet He never hesitated or blenched. He steadfastly set His face, says St Luke, “to go to **32-34.** Jerusalem.”

The Eager Christ.

What a glimpse we have here of *the eager Christ!* “He was *going before them.*” “I have a baptism to be baptized with,” He said one day; “and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!” (Luke xii. 50). “How am I straitened!” There was a sense of urgency and pressure about our Lord’s whole life; that urgency and pressure you see in His march to the cross. It was not the haste of fear. It was not the haste of a man anxious to get as quickly as possible over an ordeal from which he shrinks. Light is thrown upon this eagerness of our Lord, in Hebrews, where the writer says that, Jesus “for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising shame” (Heb. xii. 2). It was not a timid and shrinking and nervous haste; it was a glad and triumphant haste. He did not march in front as one who was broken or dismayed, else His disciples would have drawn near to comfort Him. He walked majestic.

That is the Christ we see in this incident—the obedient Christ, the courageous Christ, the eager Christ, and the loving and sacrificial Christ. For why did He hasten to the cross? “All,” as our old hymn puts it, “All to ransom guilty captives.” All for love! “He loved me, and gave Himself for me.” Well may we go on to say, “Flow, my praise, for ever flow.”

The Amazed Twelve. But I pass now from talking of the Christ revealed in this incident, to say just a word about the picture of the disciples we get here. The Twelve were

On the Way to Jerusalem

“amazed,” we read. Christ was continually giving **Mark x.** them things to “wonder” at. When He gave utter- 32-34. ance to that hard saying about the rich man and the Kingdom of God, the disciples, we learn, were amazed (it is the very same word). Their surprise then was at the Lord’s speech ; their surprise now is at the Lord Himself. It was at the staggering nature of His sayings, they wondered in verse 24 ; it is at the majesty of His Person they wonder here. And what perennial sources of wonder those two are ! The Lord’s words constantly fill us with surprise. They are so fresh, so deep, so inexhaustible. Like those who first heard them, we are always “astonished” at His teaching. And the wonder of His Person surpasses even the wonder of His words. Christ is greater than His speech. As we study His life, some new revelation of His love, or wisdom, or majesty, or power is constantly filling us with the kind of “amazement” of which the narrative speaks.

But it is not so much the description of the Twelve The Anxious Multitude. that invites notice, as the description the Evangelist gives of the more indiscriminate multitude. “And they that followed were afraid.” It is the conjunction of these two almost contradictory statements that has struck me ; they were “afraid,” but still they “followed.” “Forebodings of evil smote them, and filled them with vague terrors,” says Dr Salmond; but yet they followed. They looked at Jesus striding on in front, and were filled with trembling fear ; and yet they followed. There is a phrase in the Old Testament that seems exactly to describe the moral and spiritual condition of these people. Here it is :

St Mark x. 32—xiii. 37

Mark x.
32-34.

—“Faint,
yet Pursu-
ing.”

“Faint, yet pursuing” (Judges viii. 4). You remember where it occurs. After Gideon and his three hundred had surprised the host of Midian by their night attack, the work of pursuit began. They allowed their foes no chance to re-form and give battle again. In hot haste they pressed them. They did not stay even to take food. Right up to Jordan, Gideon and his band kept up the work. Yes, and beyond Jordan they were still at it—“faint, yet pursuing.”

—Not Men of
the Stoutest
Hearts.

And that was very much the condition of these unnamed friends and disciples of Jesus. These men were not cast in the heroic mould. They were not men like Paul, who, when his friends tried to dissuade him from making the journey to Jerusalem because bonds and imprisonment awaited him there, replied that he was ready not to be bound only, but also to die for the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts xxi. 13). They were not men of the dauntless spirit of Martin Luther, who, when his friends warned him of danger if he persisted in going to Worms, replied that though there were as many devils in Worms as there were tiles upon the housetops, yet would he go. Dr Glover compares these men to John Bunyan, who, though he had just married a second time, and had a little blind daughter dependent upon him, and though he knew that a warrant was issued for his arrest if he should persist in preaching the Gospel, went to keep his engagement at the little village of Samsell. His wife, his blind daughter, his own liberty—John Bunyan risked them all in his loyalty to Christ.

On the Way to Jerusalem

But my own feeling is that these people find their **Mark x.** real representative, not in John Bunyan himself, but **32-34.** in that Mr Fearing whom John Bunyan pictures for **—But like Mr Fearing.** us with such inimitable felicity. You remember all about Mr Fearing—a man made up of doubts and timidities. For about a month, the Dreamer tells us, he lay roaring at the Slough of Despond, not venturing to cross it, yet equally determined that he would not go back. And when he came to the wicket gate, there he stood shaking and shrinking, letting many another pass in before him, before he dared raise the hammer and give a timid knock. So it was also at Interpreter's door. He lay about in the cold a good while before he would adventure to call; yet he would not go back, “though the nights were long and cold then.” He was compact of timidities and fears, yet he would not go back. He was faint; yet he continued to pursue. He was afraid; but he followed. And Mr Fearing at last won his way into the gates of the Celestial City. This was a crowd of Mr Fearings—as they followed they were afraid.

They were afraid, but they followed. I find comfort in the thought that these men who followed Christ on His last journey were not strangers to fear. It brings them all very near to us. For most of us are much more like Mr Fearing and Mr Ready-to-Halt than we are like Mr Greatheart and Mr Valiant-for-Truth. “*Fightings without and fears within,*” that is our condition. We, too, are full of timidities and hesitations. And yet, fears and all, let us follow. Faint though we are, let us pursue. Like Mr Fearing and Mr Ready-to-Halt, we shall win home at the last.

Mark x. “ As they followed, they were afraid.” And what
32-34. was it kept them following, in spite of their fears ?
Made Bold by Jesus Christ. It was the influence of Jesus upon them. As they looked at Him, they were constrained to follow, though they were afraid. Here is the courage of Jesus, says one of the commentators, overcoming fear in the disciples. “ Consider Him,” says the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, “ that endured such gainsaying of sinners against Himself, that ye wax not weary, fainting in your souls ” (xii. 3). Consider Him ; there is inspiration in the example of Christ. The vision of the heroic Jesus banished the cowardice out of their souls. It has done so for thousands. They went cheerfully to the stake and the block and the gibbet. “ Who shall dream of shrinking,” they said, “ by our Captain led ? ” But I am not at all sure that it was a case of the Lord’s courage shaming them out of their cowardice. I am inclined to think it was a case rather of love overcoming fear. These people felt it was worth while to be with Jesus, whithersoever He might lead them. They knew somehow that Jesus was their life. And so, though they felt vaguely that trouble was impending, they still clung to Him. They were afraid ; but they followed. They were faint ; but they pursued. And that is what will overcome fear for us—love ! Perfect love casteth out fear. Yes, even an imperfect love will overcome it. To feel that Jesus is our life, to feel that He has loved us, and given Himself for us, that will make us cling to Him, despite all the sufferings and trials His service may entail. Even though our hearts be as

On the Way to Jerusalem

overwhelmed with fear, as John Bunyan's was in *Mark x.* the days before he became a preacher of the Gospel, 32-34. even though we feel that verse after verse of Scripture rises up to condemn us, we shall, like him, cling to Christ. "My case being desperate," he writes, "I thought with myself, I can but die; and if it must be so, it shall once be said that such an one died at the foot of Christ in prayer." That is it—full of fear; but love keeps us following to the very end. This is the secret of the perseverance of the saints. "The love of Christ constraineth us."

At a certain stage in the journey the Lord fell ^{The} back, and took the Twelve aside, and told them what ^{Journey's} End—and it was He was marching to. It was the third time beyond it. He had announced to them His Passion. He did it this time with greater circumstantiality and detail than ever. "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man shall be delivered unto the chief priests and the scribes; and they shall condemn Him to death, and shall deliver Him unto the Gentiles; and they shall mock Him, and shall spit upon Him, and shall scourge Him, and shall kill Him; and after three days He shall rise again" (vers. 33, 34). It was not to a throne He was marching; still His ultimate triumph was sure. For while He spoke of death He also spoke of "rising again." But what lay immediately in front of Him was rejection, insult, and a shameful death. The prospect did not appal them. Not one of them drew back, save the son of perdition. They continued with Christ in His temptations. And it is a similar prospect Christ holds out before His followers still. His ultimate

St Mark x. 32—xiii. 37

Mark x.
32-34.

triumph is certain. Away yonder there is waiting a palm-branch and a throne. But immediately and now discipleship means tribulation, suffering, sacrifice, and the cross. Shall we draw back? No, though we be afraid, we will follow. Though we be faint, we will pursue. "We are not of them that shrink back unto perdition, but of them that have faith unto the saving of the soul" (Heb. x. 39).

II

THE SONS OF ZEBEDEE

"And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto him, saying, Master, we would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire. And He said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you ? They said unto Him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on Thy right hand, and the other on Thy left hand, in Thy glory. But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask : can ye drink of the cup that I drink of ? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with ? And they said unto Him, We can. And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of ; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized : but to sit on My right hand and on My left hand is not Mine to give ; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared."—MARK x. 35-40.

I SUPPOSE that no one ever reads this paragraph **Mark x.** without considering how it came about that the sons 35-40. of Zebedee could come to Jesus with so ambitious A Strange and selfish a prayer at this particular juncture. Plea. Jesus had just told them in plain and unmistakable language that He was going to be rejected, mocked, spat upon, scourged, killed ; and these two disciples chose that particular moment to plead with Him for thrones. One would have thought that Christ's emphatic announcement would have banished from His disciples' minds this foolish dreaming. To find —And its Ex- the explanation you must turn to Luke's Gospel. planation.

St Mark x. 32—xiii. 37

Mark x. This is the comment Luke makes, after narrating our Lord's solemn announcement of His passion : 35-40.
“ And they understood none of these things ; and this saying was hid from them, and they perceived not the things that were said ” (Luke xviii. 34).
“ And they understood none of these things.” You wonder why. The announcement was plain and straightforward enough. But in this matter of the cross the disciples were so wholly possessed by their own preconceived notions that they could not and
Mr Prejudice at work. would not take in the warning. You remember how John Bunyan, in his *Holy War*, puts Ear-gate into the charge of Mr Prejudice, who had sixty completely deaf men under him as his company, men eminently advantageous for that service, inasmuch as it mattered not one atom to them what was spoken in their ear either by God or man. That is only John Bunyan’s picturesque way of saying that prejudice can make men dull and deaf to all warnings and appeals. Mr Prejudice and his sixty deaf men were, let us say, in charge of the disciples’ ears in this matter of the cross. They were so steeped in materialistic notions of Messiah’s empire, they were so completely possessed by their belief that Messiah’s path ended in an earthly throne, that they closed their ears against every mention of the cross. Christ’s words mystified them, no doubt. But they put them down as parables. They obstinately refused to take them in their plain and literal meaning. “ They understood none of these things.” We must remember all this, otherwise it is inexplicable how James and John should still be

The Sons of Zebedee

dreaming of thrones when Christ was contemplating **Mark x.**
the cross.

35-40.

Probably we should bear in mind this fact also, A Contrib-
that only a short time before Christ had worked utory Cause.
that most stupendous and overwhelming of His
miracles. He had raised Lazarus from the dead,
after he had been in the grave four days. It was a
sign that filled all who had witnessed it with wonder,
and all who heard of it with excited anticipation.
Jerusalem and Judæa were stirred from end to
end. People began to ask whether any one but the
Messiah could work such mighty signs as these. In
a word, the people at large were ready to welcome
and acclaim Jesus as Messiah, as indeed they did on
the occasion of His triumphal entry into Jerusalem.
The disciples knew all this. They were conscious of
the kind of thrill there was in the air. They felt the
throb of the popular expectancy. They made sure,
therefore, that on the occasion of this visit to
Jerusalem there would be some great apocalypse of
our Lord's Messianic dignity and power, and that
the Kingdom of God would immediately appear.
And so, full of anticipations of this kind, at a certain
stage in the journey, James and John, accompanied
by their mother Salome—Salome, indeed, being the
spokeswoman—came to Jesus with their request for
the two chief thrones.

“Master,” they said, “we would that Thou **The Plea of
the Two.**
shouldest do for us whatsoever we ask” (ver. 35).
They wish Jesus to give them a kind of blank cheque.
Eastern kings were occasionally wont, in their large
and ostentatious way, to promise persons who had

**Mark x.
35-40.**

—And the
Faith be-
hind it.

A Large
Request.

—With an
Aim.

won their regard anything they might ask—just as Herod promised Herodias' daughter anything, up to the half of his kingdom. Salome's two sons hoped to be dealt with thus. It was no doubt, as Dr Salmond says, “a large, bold, and inconsiderate demand.” But let us do this credit to Salome and her sons—the very boldness of the request shows that they believed that Christ had unlimited power. He wore nothing but the seamless cloak, but to this woman and her sons the seamless cloak could not hide His royal dignity. To them He was even now King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and all things were His to give. It was an inconsiderate, it was a foolish request, but there was faith behind it, a mistaken faith, perhaps, but, nevertheless, a great and magnificent faith.

But Christ was no Eastern despot, bestowing His favours, so to speak, blindfold ; and so He replies to the disciples' request with a question, “What would ye that I should do for you ? ” (ver. 36). He will have them state in definite and specific terms what it is they have in their mind. Perhaps James and John did not quite care to put into words what really was in their hearts. Possibly they felt a trifle ashamed of their own ambitiousness. But Christ, as Dr Morison says, will have these two disciples spread out, under the light of His observation and of their own reflection, what was lying in their hearts. And so they tell Him—or perhaps Salome tells Him for them—what it was they really wanted. “Grant unto us,” they said, “that we may sit, one on Thy right hand, and one on Thy left hand, in Thy

The Sons of Zebedee

glory" (ver. 37). The murder was out. What Mark x. these two men wanted was the highest station in the 35-40. kingdom. They wanted specially, says Dr A. B. Bruce, "to steal a march on Peter." The primacy seemed to rest between themselves and Peter, for Jesus had obviously chosen out Peter and themselves as leaders among the Twelve. But the words spoken by our Lord to Peter at Cæsarea had rankled in their minds, and had made them fear that amongst the three Peter would be first. So here they try to steal a march on Peter, and beguile their Lord into promising the chief places in the kingdom to themselves. "Grant unto us that we may sit, one on Thy right hand, and one on Thy left hand, in Thy glory."

Now it is a very easy matter to criticise this *Its Faults.* request of these two disciples and their mother. Dr A. B. Bruce, in his *Training of the Twelve*, gives a long catalogue of the faults contained in it. It was a presumptuous request, he says, because it virtually asked Jesus their Lord to become the tool of their ambition and vanity. And it was as ignorant as it was presumptuous, showing that they were poles asunder from their Lord in their thoughts of the kingdom. And it was as selfish as it was ignorant. Their own self-aggrandisement was the burden of it. Yes, this request of the sons of Zebedee was all that. Almost every fault that could attach to a prayer stares us in the face in this brief plea.

And yet, our Lord's reply is singularly mild and *The Lord's* gentle. There is no indignant denunciation. If *Reply.*

St Mark x. 32—xiii. 37

Mark x.
35-40.

Taking
Count of
Faith.

—And of
Courage.

And of Love. courage in the prayer; there was also love in it. Here was the thing these two craved above everything else, to be near their Lord. It was not altogether that they wanted to be above Peter and

there is a tone of rebuke, it is of the kindest and tenderest. Can it be that Jesus saw something beside presumption and ignorance and selfishness in this prayer? Can it be that He saw something which was grateful to His soul? I think He did. And when I look again at this prayer, I can almost guess what it was. "Grant unto us," they said, "that we may sit one on Thy right hand, and one on Thy left hand, in Thy glory." It was a mistaken prayer, it was a foolish prayer. But there was, as I have already said, a superb faith in it. Whatever others might think of Jesus, these two men believed that He deserved the kingdom, and would yet receive it. Do you not think that this would be grateful to the heart of Christ, in view of the "rejection" at the hands of chief priests and scribes which He knew was soon to be His fate? And there was courage in it. Probably they did not understand what Jesus had just told them about the cross. They refused to take it literally. But I daresay they felt there was some sort of a crisis and conflict coming, and so it became a time when the feeble and craven-hearted abandoned Christ. But these men never dreamed of leaving Him. They take that moment of solemn warning to declare that, whatever might be in store, they attached themselves definitely and finally to the cause of Christ. And surely there was more than faith and

The Sons of Zebedee

the rest. They wanted to be near Christ. John, **Mark x.** we are told, was the disciple whom Jesus loved. **35-40.** Between himself and Jesus there was a bond of closest and deepest affection. And it was the height of John's ambition, and of James' too, that in the glory the old close and tender relationship should still continue. There was deep and consecrated love in this prayer. That was heaven to these two men, to be close to Jesus. "Grant to us that we may sit, one on Thy right hand, and one on Thy left, in Thy glory." And so our Lord's answer was, as Dr Bruce says, "singularly mild." The selfishness and presumptuousness of it were distressing to Him, but the faith of it, and the courage of it, and the love of it, were grateful to His soul.

Now let us turn to look at our Lord's answer. **Ignorance in Prayer.** "Ye know not what ye ask," He said (ver. 38). A throne is never a comfortable seat. "Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown." But never was such a throne as Christ's. For His throne was the bitter cross. They did not know what suffering and agony they were asking for, in asking for a throne by the side of Christ. It was an ignorant prayer. And of how many of our prayers could not our Lord say, "Ye know not what ye ask?" Especially is that so when we ask for great things for ourselves. We little realise what risks we run, and what a price has to be paid. In our ignorance it is, as Matthew Henry quaintly puts it, folly to prescribe and wisdom to subscribe to God.

Then our Lord puts the question to them, "Are **The Cup and the Baptism.** ye able to drink the cup that I drink? or to be

Mark x.
35-40.

baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with ? ” “ The cup that I drink,” “ the baptism that I am baptized with,” they are highly significant terms. They may refer, as some commentators think, the “ cup ” to inward agony ; the “ baptism ” to outward and visible suffering. In which case it would be true to say, with Dr Glover, that the “ cup ” was fullest in Gethsemane ; and the “ baptism ” was most overwhelming on Calvary, when all God’s waves and billows went over the Redeemer’s head. Or it may be, as Dr Chadwick suggests, that the “ cup ” may refer to sufferings voluntarily accepted, and the “ baptism ” to sufferings into which we are plunged. But the former is the better explanation. The baptism, the public shame and ignominy ; the cup, the secret pain and sorrow. Anybody could see how awful a baptism Christ endured in the judgment hall and on the cross. Yet our Lord’s bitterest pangs were not those caused by physical suffering, but those caused by agony of soul. “ My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me,”—who can fathom the desolation involved in that cry ? That was part of the Lord’s bitter cup. But take them together, and the “ cup ” and the “ baptism ” stand for the totality of our Lord’s suffering. They stand also for the price of His throne. Christ did not inherit His throne. He won it. With His agony and bloody sweat, with His cross and passion, with His death and burial, He paid for it. And there is no throne in the spiritual realm except by paying a like price. That is the meaning of the question that Jesus puts to His disciples. “ Thrones,” He

The Sons of Zebedee

says, "are not to be had for the asking, Thrones **Mark x.** are to be won and paid for. And this is the price— **35-40.**" "sharing My cup and baptism."

Suffering with Christ is the condition of being The Price of glorified together. We must be ready to be baptized with His baptism ; we must be ready to suffer for righteousness sake ; we must be ready to bear scorn and insult rude ; we must be ready to face the world's hostility and contempt, in our allegiance to the will of God. And we must drink the Lord's cup. We must share in His agony for human sin. We must feel the pressure of it upon our hearts, as He did upon His. This is the condition of sharing the throne with Christ—entering into the fellowship of His sufferings. In a character sketch of a certain prominent statesman, accounting for his ineffectiveness, in spite of his manifold gifts, the writer quoted a remark made by his tutor upon him while still a youth. "He wants the Palm without the dust." Perhaps that is what these disciples wanted. Perhaps that is what we want, the palm without the dust, the crown without the cross, the Throne without the agony and sweat. And what Jesus is saying here to these two disciples, and to His disciples for all time, is, that thrones in the spiritual realm cost their price. They can only be purchased at the price of the cup and the baptism.

"Are ye able to drink the cup that I drink ? or **The Answer to the Lord's Question.** to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with ?" asked Jesus. "And they said unto Him, "We are able" (ver. 39). And this answer, the commentators all unite to tell me, is almost as

St Mark x. 32—xiii. 37

Mark x.
35-40.

foolish and ignorant as their original request. "They knew not what they asked," says Dr Glover, "and now they know not what they say." And I suppose the commentators are right. It was a light-hearted and thoughtless answer. They would have spoken far otherwise, says Dr David Smith, "had they known whereto they were pledging themselves, had it been revealed to them that a week later their Lord would be lifted up, not on a throne, but on a cross, with a cross on His right, and a cross on His left. Their love for their Master would surely have kept them faithful; but they would have spoken with faltering lips, and their answer would have been a trembling prayer for strength to drink that bitter cup and endure that bloody baptism." Yes, I believe all that. And yet there was more than ignorance and thoughtlessness in this reply. There was honest purpose in it; there was heroic love in it; there was uttermost consecration in it. These two men felt ready to go anywhere and endure anything, to drink any cup, to be baptized with any baptism, for the Lord's sake. "We are able," they said. And Christ knew that, although they were ignorant of how bitter the cup was, and how bloody the baptism, they would not falter or quail. "The cup that I drink," He said to them, "ye shall drink; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized" (ver. 39, R.V.).

The
Ambition
Realised.

It all came true. I turn to the book of the Acts of the Apostles, and I read this, "Now about that time Herod the king put forth his hands to afflict

The Sons of Zebedee

certain of the Church. And he killed James the Mark x. brother of John with the sword" (Acts xii. 1, 2). 35-40. That is where James' loyalty and zeal brought him—to a premature and cruel death. First of all the apostolic band he was called to tread the martyr way. And he never faltered or quailed. If the old tradition be true, he went to his death like a conqueror to a triumph, like a king to his crowning; he drank his Lord's cup, and was baptized with his Lord's baptism. I turn to the Revelation i. and I read of John, the second of these brothers, an exile in Patmos, "for the word of God, and the testimony of Jesus." That is where John's love and loyalty brought him—into loneliness and exile and imprisonment. And he never faltered or quailed. He drank of the Lord's cup, and was baptized with the Lord's baptism. And so I leave it to others to criticise their reply. I am subdued by the loyalty and courage, and utter devotion which they showed, and, as I think of them, the one going to exile, the other to the block, the prayer comes to my lips,

"To me, O God, may grace be given,
To follow in their train."

These men asked for thrones, and instead of thrones they received the promise of a cup and baptism. It is often so. We get from our Lord what we never asked for, what, in fact, we did not desire. We never ask for the bitter cup and the bloody baptism, but oftentimes God chooses them for us. And, like these two brothers, we sometimes

The Lord's
Way With
Us.

St Mark x. 32—xiii. 37

Mark x.
35-40.

Place in the
Heavenly
Realm.

come to thank God for giving us the things for which we did not ask, for we see that even these things work together for our good. But what of the thrones ? What of the right hand and the left hand ? “ It is for them for whom it has been prepared.” Place in the heavenly realm is determined, not by favour but by fitness. Christ can promise to every disciple a cup and baptism. But He cannot promise to any disciple the first or second place in heaven. Every man there gets the place he deserves. “ His own place.” It is for them for whom it hath been prepared. But this may be added—though our Lord does not say it in so many words—to drink the Lord’s cup, and to be baptized with the Lord’s baptism is the sure way to the throne. Our present light affliction worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Faithfulness unto death is the condition of receiving the crown of life. And that was in John’s mind when he wrote that word in his Apocalypse, “ He that overcometh, I will give to him to sit down with Me in My throne, as I also overcame, and sat down with My Father in His throne ” (Rev. iii. 21).

III

GREATNESS IN THE KINGDOM

"And when the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John. But Jesus called them to Him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: and whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. And they came to Jericho: and as he went out of Jericho with his disciples and a great number of people, blind Bartimæus, the son of Timæus, sat by the highway-side begging. And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out, and say, Jesus, Thou son of David, have mercy on me. And many charged him that he should hold his peace: but he cried the more a great deal, Thou son of David, have mercy on me."—MARK x. 41-48.

"AND when the ten heard it," *i.e.* heard the request **Mark x.** James and John had made for the two chief places **41-48.** in the Kingdom, "they began to be moved with <sup>The Attitude
of the Jews.</sup> indignation concerning James and John" (ver. 41). How they heard it we are not told. Perhaps they overheard it, though that is scarcely likely. James and John were not eager to put their wish into precise and definite terms, even to their Master Himself. They had to be pressed to do it. I do not think they could have been brought to do it at

Mark x.
41-48.

all, if the other ten disciples had been standing by listening to them. The probability is they guessed that the two brothers were asking something for themselves. For when the two with their mother came into the presence of Jesus they took up the attitude of suppliants. They came, says Matthew, “worshipping Him.” And when the other disciples saw James and John on their knees before the Master, they inferred that they were begging for something, and perhaps begging for something to the detriment of others. So when the whole incident was over they began to cross-examine the two brothers as to the subject of this private interview of theirs, and it was not long before they had wormed the ugly secret out of them. Then the ten “began to be moved with indignation against James and John.” And no wonder. From their own point of view, it was a mean and rather despicable action of which James and John had been guilty.

Their Own Ambitions.

What a light this sentence throws upon the temper of the disciples ! Why were they so angry over the action of these two disciples ? Possibly because there was not a man of them who did not want the chief place himself. Christina Rossetti has a beautiful little poem, which she entitles “The Lowest Place” :

“ Give me the lowest place ; not that I dare
Ask for that lowest place, but Thou hast died
That I might live and share the glory by Thy side.
Give me the lowest place ; or if for me
That lowest place too high, make one more low,
Where I may sit and see, my God, and love Thee so.”

But these disciples were in no mood for the lowest

Greatness in the Kingdom

place. They wanted the highest. Ambitiousness **Mark x.** was not the fault of James and John alone, it was 41-48. the fault of the entire twelve ; they were always quarrelling amongst themselves as to who should be greatest. It is a curious thing that the faults we most keenly resent in other people are just the faults to which we are specially prone ourselves. We have always, as the authors of *Guessees at Truth* say, “a sharp eye for a rival.” It takes ■ conceited man to spot conceit in another ; it takes a passionate man to detect bad temper in another ; it takes a jealous man to discover jealousy in another. And so these ambitious disciples were quick to discover the ambitiousness of James and John, and were correspondingly irritated by it.

“They began to be moved with indignation —And the concerning James and John,” and so one fault begat ^{Anger it} bred. another. That is one of the most terrible characteristics of sin—it breeds. Sin never stands isolated and alone. A man cannot commit an act of sin and have done with it, so to speak. It brings with it a whole train of attendant sins. It often involves others in its lamentable and disastrous consequences. It is the latter result we see illustrated here. The selfish request of the brothers stirred up anger and bitterness in the hearts of the ten. It disturbed the kindly relationship hitherto existing. It bred the ugly feelings of jealousy and hate. It undid the work of the Lord.

But Jesus did not allow the mischief to go far. **The Lord's Intervention.** “The ten began to be moved with indignation concerning James and John.” But He did not

**Mark x.
41-48.**

allow them to get beyond the beginning. He did not wait till the indignation had developed into a heated altercation. Words might have been spoken and deeds done that would have created a breach beyond the possibility of healing, if Jesus had allowed the quarrel to develop. He nipped it in the very bud. At the first signs of indignation and anger upon the faces of the ten He called them to Him, and began to instruct them once again in the laws of greatness in His Kingdom.

**He deals
with them
all.**

He called them *all* to Him; not James and John alone, nor the ten alone, but the two brothers and the ten. For they were all in the same condemnation. They were all of them still in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity. They were all guilty of the same selfish ambitiousness. They all cherished the same material notions of greatness. So He calls them all to Him, and propounds to them once again the law of greatness in the Kingdom of God. I say “once again” advisedly. For, if you will turn back to chapter ix. ver. 34, you will see He had already given the same lesson once before. The disciples were amazingly slow scholars. It had to be “line upon line and precept upon precept” with them. But, happily, the Master was as patient as the scholars were slow. With amazing condescension He would repeat and repeat the lessons He had to teach. I can understand, as I read the Gospels, why Peter should say that “the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation” (2 Peter iii. 15). So He repeated the old lesson on the law of greatness. In His Kingdom greatness comes to him who stoops to serve. “Ye

Greatness in the Kingdom

know," He says, "that they which are accounted to **Mark x.** rule over the Gentiles lord it over them ; and their **41-48.** great ones exercise authority over them. But it is not so among you ; but whosoever would become great among you, shall be your minister ; and whosoever would be first among you, shall be servant of all " (vers. 43, 44). The King is the type of greatness in the world ; the slave is the type of greatness in the Kingdom.

It was the former kind of greatness James and **The World** John had asked for. It was the former kind of **and the Kingdom.** greatness the ten were keen about. Their idea of greatness was to occupy a high place, and to have multitudes beneath them, serving them. It was a Herod's pomp or a Pilate's state they coveted. But the ideals of the Lord's Kingdom are totally different. It is not the man who has most people serving him, but the man who himself serves the most people, who is greatest there. These disciples by their very self-seeking were really destroying their chances of high place. For not to the man who exalted himself above his fellows, but to the man who stooped to serve them would the chief place go.

Have we learned the lesson ? Greatness out in **Greatness by Service.** the world is often a matter of the accident of birth. High place is for some hereditary, going to those who have never occupied a servile position, but have always been served. I do not know that Jesus means here to criticise this arrangement. There are advantages in hereditary rank, and it seems almost inevitable that it should be marked by a certain amount of parade and state. All that Jesus

Mark x.
41-48.

is doing here is to say that greatness in His Kingdom is of an entirely different kind, and is won by different methods. Greatness in the eternal Kingdom is not a matter of rank or birth or favour ; it is a matter of service. It cannot be inherited; it must be deserved. It cannot be bestowed as a favour ; it must be won. And the mark of the great man in the Kingdom is not that he has multitudes of people waiting upon his beck and nod, but that he himself is everybody's minister and servant. We recognise this in the case of others ; but the vital question is, Do we act upon that truth ourselves ? Do we seek the real kind of greatness ? It is strange how keen some are about earthly rank and station. But what do these things matter, after all ? The only thing that matters is position in the eternal Kingdom. And that goes not to rank or station ; it is not reached by favour or scheming. You must win it and deserve it—by service.

Do we seek
it thus ?

“ Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom,” I hear the Lord say. That is the invitation I want one day to receive. Who are the happy people who get it ? The people who have spent themselves in service. “ I was an hungry, and ye gave Me meat ; I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink ; I was a stranger, and ye took Me in ; naked, and ye clothed Me ; I was sick, and ye visited Me ; I was in prison, and ye came unto Me ” (Matt. xxv. 35, 36). Are we busy in this holy service ? Do we visit the sick, and feed the hungry, and befriend the stranger ? Earthly rank is beyond the reach of most of us. But we may all of us, if we

Greatness in the Kingdom

will, become great in the eternal Kingdom. The **Mark x.** motto of our Prince of Wales is *Ich dien*—I 41-48. serve. That motto indicates the way to princely rank in the Kingdom of God. “ Whosoever would be first shall be servant of all.”

Our Lord enforces His teaching by an appeal to ^{The} His own example. “ For verily the Son of Man ^{Example of} came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, Christ. and to give His life a ransom for many ” (ver. 45). Let us look at the first statement. “ The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.” There are two ideas here. (1) There is, first of all, the appeal to example. Jesus Himself had none of the marks of external rank and power. He was not born in the purple ; He was born in a stable. He had not a multitude of servants to wait on Him ; He was Himself a working carpenter. Jesus was not a Master ; He was in the midst of men as one that served. He did not lord it over them ; He ministered unto them. He was at everybody’s beck and call. Take a sentence like this, “ He had not leisure so much as to eat,” and let its meaning sink into your minds. For what does it imply ? It means that Jesus was so absolutely at the service of the needy and the sick that He had no time to think of Himself. Martha and Mary could send for Him ; the Roman centurion could claim Him ; Jairus could command Him ; the Caananitish woman could lay hands on Him ; and a multitude of others, halt and blind and dumb and leprous, could make their appeal to Him, and none in vain. Jesus was everybody’s servant. He lived not to be

Mark x.
41-48.

ministered unto, but to minister. And in the very reminder there is an appeal. The disciples must be content to be what He was, “If I then, the Lord and the Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another’s feet” (John xiii. 14).

The Way
to His
Kingdom.

(2) There is, secondly, the suggestion that it was through ministry that Christ Himself was seeking His Kingdom. For let us never forget Christ was a King; and the establishment of a Kingdom was, from one point of view, the object of His coming. Yet it was not by “lording” it over men that He proposed to establish His Kingdom, but rather by serving them. It was, indeed, in His power to use the other method. He might have established an earthly kingdom, had He so wished. He might have rivalled the Roman procurator, or Herod, or even great Cæsar, in the matter of pomp and state, had He so willed. But He chose the path of service. And by that path He has entered upon a Kingdom such as no Herod or Cæsar ever knew. For that is what has given Christ His empire. He rules in innumerable hearts, because He loved men and served men to the uttermost. The cross was the last service love could render. To serve the race He loved Christ did not shrink from that last and uttermost sacrifice. And the cross has given Him His Kingdom. You remember how Paul couples the two things together. He became “obedient unto death, yea, the death of the cross. Wherefore also God highly exalted Him, and gave unto Him the name which is above every name” (Phil. ii. 8, 9). That is it. He became “servant of all,” and He is

Greatness in the Kingdom

now the first of all. And that is the way to greatness **Mark x.** for the disciple as well as the Master. There is no **41-48.** other path for us to the throne and the Kingdom, save the path He trod. No cross, no crown. But if we suffer with Him and serve with Him, we shall also be glorified together.

And now I pass on to dwell for a moment on the ^{The} last clause in this great verse. "The Son of Man ^{Ransom.} came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many" (ver. 45). "A ransom for many." "This great saying," remarks Dr David Smith, "has a priceless value." "It is only a metaphor," he says further, "but it expresses a truth which is the very heart of the Gospel, and without which there is no Gospel at all." Let us examine the saying, to discover if we can what is the truth which constitutes the Gospel which it expresses. All hangs on the meaning we attach to that word "ransom." What idea would the word "ransom" suggest to the disciples who heard Christ use it? Dr A. B. Bruce suggests that it would at once bring to their minds the half-shekkel which every adult Jew paid into the Temple Treasury at Passion time, "a ransom for his soul unto the Lord." But Dr David Smith contends, and Dr Morison agrees with him, that it would inevitably suggest to the minds of the disciples another idea as well, viz. the price of deliverance paid for the redemption of captives. But, whichever explanation we prefer, the essential point remains the same. Our Lord represents His life as laid down in order to win redemption for many. It is a life given "instead

St Mark x. 32—xiii. 37

Mark x.
41-48.

of " many. And that life so given is the redemption price that sets the many free. Christ thinks of men as bond-slaves under sin ; exposed to the doom and penalty of sin. And by His own death somehow or other He delivers men from this doom ; He opens the way for a new relation to God, so that men are no longer criminals, but sons of God and heirs of eternal life.

The Doctrine
and the
Gospels.

It is said that there is no suggestion of a doctrine of the Atonement in the Gospels ; that the doctrine of the Atonement as we know it is the result of apostolic and especially Pauline philosophising about the death of Jesus. It is true that in the Gospels you get no elaborated and articulated doctrine of the cross. That is not surprising. Christ had to die before the meaning of His death could be understood and explained. But, unless you wipe out sayings like these, it is simply untrue to say that Atonement is an invention of the Apostles. All that Paul says, and all that Peter says, and all that John says, is implied in a saying like this. For if the passage means anything at all, it means vicarious suffering. When John said, " Unto Him that loveth us, and loosed us from our sins by His blood " (Rev. i. 5), he is only repeating what Jesus Himself says here. When Peter said, " redeemed, not with corruptible things, as silver or gold . . . but with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish, and without spot " (1 Peter i. 18, 19), he is only repeating what Jesus Himself says here. And when Paul says, " Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us " (Gal. iii. 13), he is

Greatness in the Kingdom

only repeating what Jesus Himself says here. He **Mark x.** bought our freedom and our life by the sacrifice of 41-48. His own. That was the object of His coming. People speculate as to whether Christ would have come into our world, had there been no sin. I do not know. All that I do know is, that it was to deliver us from sin that He actually came. "The Son of Man came to give His life ■ ransom for many." And He paid the ransom. He offered the one full and perfect oblation and sacrifice. He set men free from the law of sin and death. And that is the Gospel. There is no Gospel for a sinning world without it. But what a Gospel this is,

" Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
In my place condemned He stood,
Sealed my pardon with His blood,
Hallelujah."

" The Son of Man came . . . to give His life a ransom for many."

IV

BLIND BARTIMÆUS

" And they came to Jericho : and as He went out of Jericho with His disciples and a great number of people, blind Bartimæus, the son of Timæus, sat by the highway side begging. And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out, and say, Jesus, Thou son of David, have mercy on me. And many charged him that he should hold his peace ; but he cried the more a great deal, Thou son of David, have mercy on me. And Jesus stood still, and commanded him to be called. And they call the blind man, saying unto him, Be of good comfort, rise ; He calleth thee. And he, casting away his garment, rose, and came to Jesus. And Jesus answered and said unto him, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee ? The blind man said unto him, Lord, that I might receive my sight. And Jesus said unto him, Go thy way ; thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way."—MARK x. 46-52.

**Mark x.
46-52.**

The
Accounts of
the Miracle.

—How
Reconciled.

I SHALL not discuss the differences between the various accounts the three Evangelists give of this particular incident. No two of them tell the story in exactly the same way. Matthew and Mark, for instance, both agree that the miracle took place as Christ was leaving Jericho. Luke says it took place as our Lord was entering the town. But even Matthew and Mark do not agree among themselves, for Mark only mentions one blind man, while Matthew says there were two. Various ingenious attempts have been made to reconcile these

Blind Bartimæus

differences. The fact that Mark mentions only **Mark x.** one blind man, while Matthew mentions two, may **46-52.** perhaps be explained on the ground that Bartimæus was far the more prominent and active of the two, and so overshadowed his companion that, in the memory of those who witnessed it, the miracle came to be specially identified with Bartimæus. But the discrepancy between Matthew and Mark on the one side, and Luke on the other, does not admit of such easy explanation. Bengel suggests that what really happened was this—that Bartimæus made his first appeal to Christ as He entered the city, but that Christ did not answer his appeal then ; so Bartimæus, taking a blind friend along with him, waylaid Jesus as He went out of the city the next morning ; that this time his appeal was answered, and both he and his friend were cured. Others, again, convinced that the two accounts cannot be reconciled, say that what really happened was this, that there were two different miracles performed by Jesus at Jericho, one as He went into the city, and the other as He left it. This, however, is a suggestion of despair, and lands us in more and greater difficulties than it removes. There was only one miracle performed at Jericho. But if we cannot reconcile in every detail the accounts the Evangelists give us of it, that need not trouble us. The fact that there are slight divergencies in the various narratives does not discredit them ; it does the very opposite, it adds to the weight of their witness. For quite obviously it shows that we have here three independent testimonies. If they slavishly copied one another in

The Value of
Divergencies.

Mark x.
46-52.

every detail, we should suspect that we had in them only three versions of one and the selfsame story. But the very divergencies and contradictions show that what we actually possess is three separate and independent accounts. And in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established.

**The Lord,
the Needy
One, and the
Crowd.**

Let us now turn to the story, as Mark, in his own vivid and characteristic way, tells it. There are three actors or sets of actors in it—the Lord, the crowd, and Bartimæus. We may gather many a profitable lesson from a study of the conduct of our Lord in this incident. For every miracle that our Lord ever did is, as John says, a sign. It is an index to His character and spirit. It is a window into His soul. And His dealings with Bartimæus throw light upon His purposes of grace. “Thy gentleness hath made me great,” says one of the Psalmists (xviii. 35). Bartimæus might well have taken that for his motto for the rest of his days. It is an illustration of how the gentleness of the Lord stooped to a poor blind beggar, and made life rich and glad for him. We might gather salutary lessons of warning from the conduct of the harsh and unfeeling crowd, that would fain have hushed Bartimæus’ cries, and so prevented him from finding his Deliverer. Surely, if ever a crowd came near falling under that stern condemnation the Lord pronounced upon those who put stumbling-blocks in their brothers’ way, this crowd did, when, as Bartimæus lifted up his voice and cried for help and healing, it bade him hold his peace. But it is upon Bartimæus I want to concentrate attention.

Blind Bartimæus

It is interesting to notice that Mark is the only **Mark x.** one who has preserved the name of Bartimæus for us. 46-52.

The probability is, as Archbishop Trench suggests, **The Blind Man and his Hope.** that by the Lord's gracious dealings with him,

Bartimæus was drawn into the circle of the disciples, and was sufficiently well known in the Church of later days to make it a matter of interest to many that he, and no other, was the object of Christ's healing power. At the time at which we are introduced to him in this narrative, however, Bartimæus was only a blind beggar. He took his stand on the side of the road leading to Jerusalem. He chose that particular spot because of the number of pilgrims passing along on their way to Passover at Jerusalem. And Bartimæus knew, like the lame man at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple, that there was a close and intimate connection between religion and philanthropy ; that no persons were so likely to have pity on him in his blindness as those who had the love of God in their hearts.

Pilgrims who usually travelled on that Jerusalem road went in companies, for it was a road of evil reputation. On this particular morning Bartimæus, with **The Passing Throng.** that quick and subtle instinct the blind possess, knew it was not an ordinary band of pilgrims that was passing. It may be, as some suggest, that instead of the singing and laughing groups that went by, this one moved on hushed and silent, still held in wondering awe by the appearance of the Christ. I am inclined myself, however, to favour a simpler and more obvious explanation, and say that it was the size of the crowd that communicated itself to Bartimæus.

**Mark x.
46-52.**

With that sharpened sense of hearing which often comes to the blind as a partial compensation for the loss of sight, Bartimæus knew it was no ordinary band, that it was a throng, a multitude. He seems to have made inquiries of some passer-by as to what all the excitement was about, and he received for answer the information that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by.

"And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth," Mark says, "he began to cry out, and say, 'Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me'" (ver. 47).

**And "Jesus
of Nazareth."**

Now, something must be assumed, in order to understand this cry. Bartimæus must have heard of Jesus. And he must have heard also of His mighty works. Remember once again that, only a short time before, Christ had performed the mightiest of all His miracles, in raising Lazarus from the dead after he had been in the grave four days. That miracle had put all Judæa into a ferment of excitement. News of it had no doubt reached Jericho, and had come amongst others to the ears of Bartimæus. It had stirred hope within him. It had made him long that the same Jesus would come his way; for the Jesus who could raise a dead man to life could, he argued, restore sight again to his blind eyes. And now that very Jesus was actually passing, the Jesus who had raised Lazarus, the Jesus into whose presence he had longed to come.

**The Blind
Man and his
Opportunity.**

Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. It was the opportunity he had longed for, but scarcely hoped ever to obtain. Quick as a flash the prayer leaped to his lips, "Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me." And that is the first thing I want you to

Blind Bartimæus

notice about Bartimæus, that he was a man who **Mark x.** recognised his opportunity and seized it. **Bartimæus 46-52.** was, as Dr Glover says, like those wise virgins whom our Lord speaks of in His parable. As soon as ever the cry is made that the bridegroom cometh, he trims his lamp of prayer and faith, and goes out to meet Him. He is like those servants who, when their Lord cometh, are found watching. He had often thought of Jesus ; often prayed in his heart that Jesus might pass his way ; and so, though the Lord came suddenly and unexpectedly Bartimæus was not unprepared. Supposing that Bartimæus had not seized his opportunity ? He would never have had another, for Jesus never returned that way again. Bartimæus, if he had missed this opportunity, would have missed healing, sight, eternal life. All this is a commonplace about opportunity. The neglect of opportunity is often punished by the loss of it.

“ There is a tide in the affairs of men,
Which taken at the flood, leads on to fortune.
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.”

There were two Saxon kings named Ethelred, and **The Unready** of the reign of the second of them Freeman says it **and their Loss.** was “ the worst and most shameful in our annals. This country of ours was raided and harried in every direction. And the secret of the national disgrace and shame is to be found in the nickname they gave the king ; they called him Ethelred the Unready.” The unready man is always doomed to loss and shame. It is so in spiritual, as well as merely material things. That is why the Bible lays such

**Mark x.
46-52.**

stress upon to-day. That is why it insists that now is the day of salvation. That is why it makes a reiterated appeal to us to be ready. Opportunities of grace come swiftly and suddenly to us, and, if not seized, they pass. Jesus, for instance, came one day to a Samaritan village, and the inhabitants would not receive Him. John and James were so angry they wanted to call down fire from heaven. No, Jesus would have no fire from heaven. And yet those Samaritans were punished, sorely, terribly punished. For this is what I read, "They went to another village." Jesus left them. They missed their chance. And men may miss Christ to-day, unless they are ready to call to Him when He passes by them, and to welcome Him when He knocks at the door of their hearts. There comes to us gracious seasons of spiritual emotion. Noble impulses are stirred within us. Our hearts melt and become tender in response to some moving appeal. The Lord Jesus is calling us. But if we refuse to act. What happens. ? The light fails and the glow cools, the gracious impulse departs, perhaps never to return.

**Divine
Patience and
its Limits.**

We glory in the patience of our Lord. The long-suffering of the Lord is salvation. But it is not a limitless patience. I read a solemn sentence like this, "My Spirit shall not strive with man for ever." And again, "Ephraim is turned to his idols, let him alone." I read of some folk whom the Apostle describes as being "past feeling," people whose opportunity is gone, Let us take warning by these statements. "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by." Let us cry to Him. Let us make our appeal to Him.

Blind Bartimæus

Lest it should ever have to be said to us, "Jesus of Mark x. Nazareth has passed by," and we should be classed 46-52. amongst the "unready," who missed the tide, and lost their chance.

Next let us see in Bartimæus a man of strong and vigorous faith. It comes out in the very words of the appeal he addressed to Jesus. The answer the passers-by gave to his question was that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. "Jesus of Nazareth;" so they spoke of Him. There is no suggestion that they saw in Jesus any glint of the heavenly and the Divine. But it is not Jesus of Nazareth Bartimæus calls him, "Jesus, Thou Son of David," he cries, "have mercy on me." "Thou Son of David!" this blind beggar gives Jesus the Messianic title. Physically blind though he was, he saw further into spiritual things than the multitude. He had heard about Jesus, about His wonderful words, and still more wonderful deeds. He had meditated upon it all in his heart. And while other people were quarrelling and debating who Christ was, this blind man had made up his mind that this Jesus Who was giving sight to the blind, and cleansing to the leper, and life to the dead, was none other than the promised Christ. Scribes and Pharisees spoke of Christ as an emissary of Beelzebub. Bartimæus was persuaded he was the long-looked for Messiah. And the faith of his soul expresses itself in his cry, "Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me!"

There are all shades of faith and unbelief recorded —A Faith for us in the New Testament, from the blank disbelief ^{not daunted} by Dis- of the Nazarenes and the hesitating and halting couragement.

St Mark x. 32—xiii. 37

Mark x.
46-52.

faith of the father of the demoniac boy, up to the centurion's superb and splendid faith, which compelled the wonder and admiration of our blessed Lord Himself. Bartimæus' faith was akin to that of the centurion. It was faith of the heroic and intrepid sort. And the strength and courage of Bartimæus' faith come out in this—that it was not daunted by discouragement. When he began to cry out many rebuked him, Mark tells us, "that he should hold his peace." Some commentators say they rebuked him because they were offended by his application to Jesus of the Messianic title; but my own belief is that when they tried to hush Bartimæus, they thought they were being kind to Christ. Perhaps Christ had still that rapt and exalted expression on His face which, as we read in verse 32, filled those who followed Him with wonder and awe. They felt that Christ had great concerns and cares of His own. And so, when Bartimæus cried out, they tried to silence him; they felt it was something like sacrilege to intrude upon Christ just then; they felt that it was an impertinence on the blind beggar's part to claim attention from One Who was obviously occupied with great thoughts and cares.

Mistaken
Kindness.

They were cruel to Bartimæus, in their efforts to be kind to Christ. It only showed, of course, how completely they misunderstood the Lord. We may write down this as axiomatic. We are never really kind to Christ if we are harsh or stern to the least of His people. Christ came to seek and save the lost, and we are defeating the very purpose for

Blind Bartimæus

which Christ came, when we keep the least and the **Mark x.** lost away from Him. Bartimæus, however, refused **46-52.** to be silenced. His faith was not to be daunted by discouragement.

The effect of the rebukes of the crowd was this, **The Faith that Wins the Blessing.** according to Mark's account, "He cried out the more a great deal, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me" (ver. 48). Bartimæus' faith was a faith that bore up and pressed on, and persevered. And that is the kind of faith that wins the blessing. There are plenty of voices to bid us hold our peace when we cry to Christ. Worldly friends laugh at us. Commonsense says that it is useless. A guilty conscience urges that it is impossible that Christ should notice us. We need the faith that can bear up against all these things. We shall reap in due season, if we faint not! You remember how John Bunyan stuck to his praying, in spite of sore temptation. This is how he describes his own experience, "Then the Tempter laid at me very sore, suggesting that neither the mercy of God, nor yet the blood of Christ, did at all concern me, therefore it was but in vain to pray. 'Yet,' thought I, 'I will pray.' 'But,' said the Tempter, 'your sin is unpardonable.' 'Well,' said I, 'I will pray.' 'It is to no boot,' said he. 'Yet,' said I, 'I will pray.' And so I went to prayer to God. And as I was thus before the Lord, that Scripture fastened on my heart. 'O man, great is thy faith,' even as if one had clapped me on the back, as I was on my knees before God." That is it exactly. It is the faith that will not be discouraged that gets the blessing.

St Mark x. 32—xiii. 37

Mark x. It is persevering and believing prayer that finds the answer. We fail because we are so easily daunted. Here is a prayer for us all : “Lord, increase our faith.”

46-52.

Faith Triumphant. The crowd was for passing Bartimæus by, but as soon as his cry reached the ears of the Lord, He stood still, and said, “Call ye him.” Our Lord never turns a deaf ear to the cry of need. And the very people who had before rebuked Bartimæus, now that Christ takes notice of him, change their tone, and say, “Courage, rise, He calleth thee.” Bartimæus did not need a second invitation. With impetuous eagerness he cast away the outer garment that rather impeded his movements, and came to Jesus. And Jesus answered him and said, “What wilt thou that I should do unto thee ? And the blind man said unto Him, Rabboni, that I may receive my sight (ver. 51). And Jesus said unto him, Go thy way ; thy faith hath made thee whole. And straightway he received his sight ” (ver. 52). Nearly every sentence in this colloquy suggests thought. But I pass everything by, just to say that here we see faith triumphant. Here we see prayer answered. Is any true, deep, earnest prayer ever unanswered ? “Thou satisfiest the desire of every living thing,” says the Psalmist (cxlv. 16). “Every one that asketh receiveth,” says our Lord (Matt. vii. 8), “and he that seeketh, findeth.” So let us, as Dr Glover says, sow the seeds of prayer on the heart of God. There is no hard ground, or rocky soil, or thorny ground there. His heart is the good soil of tender and gracious love. Let us scatter the seed of prayer, and we

Blind Bartimæus

shall get a harvest of blessing. According to our **Mark x.**
faith it shall be unto us.

46-52.

A final word about the end of Bartimæus' history
—And he "followed Him in the way" (ver. 52). The Man of
Loyal
Obedience.

One of the greatest sorrows of our Lord's life was that so many took His benefits without giving Him their hearts. "Were there not ten cleansed?" He asked one day. "Where are the nine?" They had accepted His gift, they neglected the Giver. He healed numbers of sick folk and leprous folk, and blind folk and lame folk, and palsied folk, during the years of His brief ministry. Where were they all, when Jerusalem rang with the cry, "Crucify Him"? Apparently there was not one grateful enough to lift up his voice on His behalf. But, however disappointed Christ may have been in others, He was not disappointed in Bartimæus; for this was the use Bartimæus made of his new found sight, "he followed Him in the way." He did not go home to his friends, he clung to Him Who had healed and saved him, "he followed Him in the way." His experience of Christ's mercy was followed by a life of obedience.

We too have experienced the saving mercy of Is that
Obedience
Ours? Christ; are we following in the way? How many there are who receive Christ's benefits yet neglect Him still! Are we amongst them? "Happy," says Bishop Chadwick, "is the man whose eyes are open to discern and his heart prompt to follow the print of those holy feet." And so Jericho was kind to Christ. Jericho gave two new disciples to Christ. At the time when others were turning

St Mark x. 32—xiii. 37

Mark x. their backs upon Him, two men—Zacchæus, the chief publican, and Bartimæus—gave their hearts to Him as He trod the way that led to the cross. Are we also with them and following Him in the way ?

V

THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

"And when they came nigh to Jerusalem, unto Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount of Olives, He sendeth forth two of His disciples, and saith unto them, Go your way into the village over against you : and as soon as ye be entered into it, ye shall find a colt tied, whereon never man sat ; loose him, and bring him. And if any man say unto you, Why do ye this ? say ye that the Lord hath need of him ; and straightway he will send him hither. And they went their way, and found the colt tied by the door without in a place where two ways met ; and they loose him. And certain of them that stood there said unto them, What do ye, loosing the colt ? And they said unto them even as Jesus had commanded : and they let them go. And they brought the colt to Jesus, and cast their garments on him ; and He sat upon him. And many spread their garments in the way : and others cut down branches off the trees, and strawed them in the way. And they that went before, and they that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna ; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord : Blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord : Hosanna in the highest."—MARK xi. 1-10.

IN his account of the life of our Lord Dr David Mark xi. Smith calls attention to one significant and striking 1-10. difference between Christ's methods in Galilee and Our Lord in His methods whenever He visited Jerusalem. In Galilee He kept His Messiahship veiled. He forbade the noising abroad of His wonderful works. He commanded His disciples to keep silent about the glory of the holy mount. Again and again, when excitement and enthusiasm were growing high, He

Mark xi. would escape from the crowds, and hide Himself in
I-10. some solitude beyond their reach.

The reason for this reserve on the part of Jesus in Galilee is not hard to discover. Galilee was in an inflammable condition. The people were on the tip-toe of expectancy. Every Messianic pretender was sure of finding a following in Galilee. If Jesus had plainly announced Himself as Messiah, the smouldering excitement would have blazed up into a flame of open revolt. Swords would have leaped out of their scabbards, and insurrection would have been the order of the day. As it was, they tried on more than one occasion to take Jesus Christ by force and make Him King.

—And in
Jerusalem.

But He followed a policy the precise opposite of this whenever He visited Jerusalem. He paid only a few brief visits to the capital in the course of His ministry, but the significant thing is this—He never visited Jerusalem without in one way or another asserting His Messiahship. He did so the first time, by sweeping out of the sacred precincts those who bought and sold, and by speaking of the Temple as His Father's house. He did so the second time by healing the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath day, and by claiming, in response to the challenge of the Jews, that He shared in the privileges and prerogatives of God. He did so the third time by proclaiming Himself the "Light of the World," by healing the man who had been born blind, and by declaring plainly, in response to the blind man's query, that He Himself was the long-promised Messiah of God.

The Triumphal Entry

Again, the reason for this change of policy is not Mark xi. far to seek. Jerusalem was the capital. In Jeru- 1-10. salem lived the priests and rulers of the nation. Upon Jerusalem's attitude Christ's fate, humanly speaking, hung. And so He took every opportunity of presenting His claims to the rulers and citizens of Jerusalem with all possible emphasis and clearness. If, after all, they rejected Him, they should not be able to plead ignorance. They should do so in face of the plainest and most unequivocal declaration on His own part. They should be without excuse. And so in Jerusalem our Lord made no secret of His claims. Without reserve He announced Himself as the Messiah of God. But no declaration of His Messiahship was so unmistakable, so impressive, so deliberate, as that which He made on the first day of the week of His Passion, when He rode in lowly state into Jerusalem sitting on an ass's colt. Everybody knew what it meant. The pilgrims knew what it meant, and they rent the air with the cry, "Hosanna to the Son of David." And the rulers and Pharisees knew what it meant, for they were indignant that the people should apply the Messianic name to Jesus, and when He refused to rebuke them, they went away, and took counsel how they might kill Him. This triumphal entry put an end to all reserves and concealments. By riding like a king to His capital, Jesus declared to every one plainly who He was. You may say, it was at one and the same time a last appeal and final warning. It was a last appeal. An appeal to Jerusalem to repent and believe while its opportunity lasted. And a ^{A Last Appeal and a Final Warning.}

Mark xi. 1-10. warning that their hate and rage were directed against One Who was none other than God's Anointed. There is nothing to be said in excuse for the crime of the Friday after the triumphal entry of the Monday. Priests and elders sinned with their eyes wide open.

The Order of Events. To get the true chronology of this incident we must compare Gospel with Gospel. From a comparison with St John's Gospel, it would appear that Mark has got his account of the Bethany feast slightly out of the true order. Mark postpones his account of that feast and Mary's unforgettable deed, the implication being that it happened after the triumphal entry. But the probability is that John's order is the true one, and that it was after Martha's feast that the entry took place. We must assume then that on the Sabbath Jesus and His disciples rested at Bethany, that He spent His last Sabbath on earth in the home that was dearest to Him, and amongst the friends He loved the best. And on the first day of the week—that is, on our Palm Sunday—He made this triumphal march into the capital.

A Settled Plan.

We know how on previous occasions the crowd was eager to force royal honours upon Jesus; in this case He arrogates them to Himself. The whole is of our Lord's initiation and devising. In the morning of the day He sends off two of His disciples to an unknown friend who had an ass's colt whereon no man ever yet sat. The procedure, no doubt, had been arranged between this man and our Lord. For Jesus had more disciples in the

The Triumphal Entry

world than others thought. Not one of the twelve, **Mark xi.** it would seem, knew this man, but Jesus knew him. **I-10.** In one way or another Jesus had come into contact with him, just as He had with the good man of the house about whom we shall read later on. He had arranged with the owner that some day He would requisition this young colt. They had settled ■ sort of pass-word, "The Lord hath need of him." And when the two disciples appeared, and in answer to the questions put to them gave the pass-word, "The Lord hath need of him," the owner made no further demur. And when they had brought the colt to Jesus, they cast on it their garments, and so improvised ■ saddle, and set Jesus thereon. Seated on that ass's colt Jesus set out on His "state-entry" into Jerusalem.

Now when our Lord chose to enter Jerusalem in **A Fulfilled Prediction.** that fashion, He deliberately proclaimed Himself the fulfilment of ancient prophecy. There was a prophecy which, Dr David Smith says, was much discussed by the Rabbis, and which at the sight of Jesus making a public entry into Jerusalem in such guise, was bound to leap into men's minds. It was a prophecy of Zechariah about the advent of the Messiah king. "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion, shout, O daughter of Jerusalem; behold, thy king cometh unto thee; He is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, even upon a colt the foal of an ass" (Zech. ix. 9). Now Jesus meant by His action to remind the people round Him of that ancient prophecy. He meant them to find in Him its fulfilment. And the people did not

**Mark xi.
I-10.**

fail to catch Christ's meaning. They at once leaped to the significance of the action. There was a considerable company of people who had travelled up from Jericho with Jesus. There was a still larger contingent of pilgrims, who, stirred by the story of Lazarus' raising from the dead, and hearing that it was the intention of Christ to enter the city that morning, had come out to see this wonderful Prophet for themselves. As soon as these pilgrims saw Jesus riding down the Mount of Olives, sitting on this ass's colt, the meaning of it all flashed upon them. Here was the long-promised and long-expected Messiah Himself. So in their enthusiasm some took their garments, and spread them in the way, and some took branches of trees, which they cut and brought from the adjacent fields, and all the way from Bethany to Jerusalem those that went before and those that followed after cried as they marched, "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the kingdom that cometh ; the kingdom of our father David : Hosanna in the highest" (ver. 10).

**The
Kingship of
Christ.**

Such, then, is the story. Its central significance is this—that here is the proclamation of Christ's kingship. At last, as Bishop Chadwick says, "Jesus openly and practically assumes rank as a monarch, and allows men to proclaim the advent of His Kingdom." This day of His triumphant entry was our Lord's proclamation day ; not His crowning day, for proclamation and crowning are not one and the same. I remember very well that on a certain day in January, 1901, the Bournemouth corporation in

The Triumphal Entry

their robes of office gathered in the square, and the **Mark xi.** Mayor for the time being read a State paper which **I-IO.** declared Edward VII. to be King of these realms. That was proclamation day. But coronation day did not come round for eighteen months after that.

Now our Lord too had His proclamation day and His Proclamation and He had also His crowning day His Coronation came when they nailed Him between two thieves : nation. it was then they actually placed Him upon the royal seat, and set the crown of empire upon His brow. But He was proclaimed, publicly and solemnly proclaimed as King, when He rode in triumph into Jerusalem, and the multitude sang as He moved along, "Hosanna, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of Jehovah." In the forecasts of seer and prophet the kingly aspect of Messiah's office looms large. In the Jewish mind it almost obscured and hid every other aspect, with the result that they did not recognise "the King" in the meek and lowly Jesus. But, meek and lowly though He was, Jesus knew Himself to be a king, and by this state-entry He declared and proclaimed it. Just as a few days later, in answer to Pilate's question, "Art thou a King then ?" He answered, "Thou sayest that I am a king," so now, by riding in lowly state into Jerusalem, and accepting the plaudits of the people as His due, He announced Himself to the world as the promised King whom God would yet set upon His holy hill of Zion.

Do we often think of Christ in that way ? Do The Lord as we think of Him as King ? Do we often dwell upon Saviour, Friend and His majesty and right to rule ? I wonder if I am Brother.

St Mark x. 32—xiii. 37

Mark xi. wrong in thinking that the kingship of Jesus is to a large extent a forgotten and neglected truth ? We prefer to lay the emphasis upon the other aspects of Our Lord's office and character. We like to speak of Him as the Saviour, Who in His pity and love stooped to the cross to save us from sin and death. We like to speak of Him as our Friend, bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, touched with the feeling of our infirmities. We like to speak of Him as Brother, willing to enter our homes and to share with us the burdens and sorrows and trials of our mortal life. It is the gentler and more condescending aspects of our Lord's character upon which we lay the most stress. It is part and parcel of that tendency, marked enough in the religious life of our day, to ignore every attribute of God save His love, and so to magnify His pitifulness and compassion as to obscure His holiness and majesty.

—But King also.

Now I rejoice in the fact that Christ is my Saviour, my Friend, my Brother. I rejoice that in the strength of love He stoops to take my hand, to make my heart His home, and my life His care. But I would not forget that this same Jesus, who is Saviour, Friend, and Brother, is also King ; that this Jesus, Who is full of grace and truth, is also Lord of glory, before Whom cherubim and seraphim veil their faces, Whose steps legions of angels attend, Who has all authority given to Him in heaven and on earth. Perhaps, in these days, we need nothing more than the recovery of the bracing sense of the authority, majesty and kingship of Jesus. Dr Dale has left it on record how in a time of weakness and

The Triumphal Entry

prostration it was this thought of Christ as King, *Mark xi.* that steadied him, and gave him courage and *1-10.* strength. History also bears witness to the fact that the strongest and most fearless Christians the world has ever known are those who realised most vividly Christ's kingship, Whose watchword was the crown rights of the Redeemer. A realisation of the same truth will tone and brace up our religious life. It will be well, then, for us to stand again and again with these applauding crowds, and sing, "Hosanna, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of Jehovah," and to speak of Him not simply as Saviour, Brother, Friend, but to say of Him, in words familiar to us all, "Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ, Thou art the Everlasting Son of the Father."

But we may not simply learn from this story the *The Nature of Christ's Kingship.* truth that Christ is King ; we may gather from it also suggestions as to the kind of kingship Christ's is. The Jews were right in expecting Messiah to be a king. Where they went wrong was in expecting that He would be a king like Herod or like Caesar. They dreamed of a material empire, and of a monarch who used carnal weapons to win it. How different is the idea of kingship we get from this story ! " My Kingdom is not of this world," said Jesus to Pilate, and the story of His triumphal entry is the best commentary upon that statement. Whenever an earthly monarch makes a state entry into any place, it is marked by pageantry, and the display of military force. What a contrast is Our Lord's triumphal procession ! There is nothing of the pomp and pageantry of royalty about His appearance ; He

St Mark x. 32—xiii. 37

Mark xi. rides, not on the warlike horse, but on an ass's colt. There is no suggestion of armed force. The Roman soldiers looked out from the fort on the throng, as the procession approached the city, and they felt no anxiety or concern ; for all the escort Christ had was a crowd of singing pilgrims. Verily, the Kingdom was not of this world. It was a Kingdom of peace ! Christ came not to make war upon men, but to preach peace to them that were far off, and peace to them that were nigh ; to make peace between a man and his own self, between man and his neighbour, between man and God.

The Kingdom of Peace. **I-10.** —How Established. This Kingdom was not to be established by carnal weapons. “He is meek,” says one of the prophets, “and having salvation.” He is meek. And how this incident proclaimed it ! There is here no war horse, no weapon. His attendants carry palms, not spears. Those who accompany Him, as Dr Glover says, spread their garments in the way, but don no armour. It is obvious this King does not mean to win His Kingdom by force of arms. Nor does He. “Conquering by gentleness,” that is the Lord’s plan. All human government must, in the last resort, depend upon force ; but not the rule and government of Christ. He trusts for His Kingdom absolutely to spiritual forces. His empire is one of moral influences : He trusts to the truth ; He trusts to His love. He needs no worldly support, no patronage of states or governments to promote His empire. He will leave truth and love to do their own work upon human hearts. He is meek. But what did He Himself say about the meek ? “Blessed are the

The Triumphal Entry

meek, for they shall inherit the earth." And the **Mark xi.** meek Jesus, Who trusted entirely to the power of **I-IO.** truth and the force of love, He too has inherited the earth. His Kingdom already stretches from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth. He has founded an empire the like of which for endurance and extent the world has never seen. "Alexander, Cæsar, Charlemagne and I," the great Napoleon is reported to have said, "have founded great empires." But upon what did these creations of our genius depend? Upon force. Jesus alone founded an Empire upon love, and to this day millions would die for Him." Christ trusted to His love. He did not coerce; He appealed. He did not threaten; He wooed. And the meek has inherited the earth.

Now look away from Jesus, the central figure, to **The Applauding People.** the applauding people. Nothing could exceed their enthusiasm. No royal honours were too great to be paid to Jesus that day. People spread their garments and branches of trees in the way, and as He rode on, those who went before and those who followed after cried, "Hosanna, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of Jehovah." But pass on to the Friday when Jerusalem echoed with a far different cry; when this Jesus, now saluted as King, was hounded as a criminal; when the shout of "Hosanna" gave place to the hoarse and savage cry, "Crucify Him!" Where were those applauding multitudes on the Friday? Not one of them then lifted up a voice on behalf of Christ. It may well be that these same people who sang

**Mark xi.
I-10.** “Hosanna” on the Sunday helped to swell the shout of “Crucify Him” on the Friday. For there are strange fluctuations of feeling, and this enthusiasm on the Sunday may have been nothing more than a brief and transient emotion. But, in any case, they must have let the plaudits of Sunday take the place of steady and daily obedience. It is easier far to applaud Christ than it is to obey Him ; to cheer Him, than to do His will. But it is obedience He asks for.

**Is Christ
our King ?**

If He is King, and we acknowledge Him as such, He wants our loyal and unhesitating allegiance, our faithful service. These people did not give it Him. Are we giving it ? Is Christ our King ? Do we live by His laws ? Are we consciously and deliberately doing Him service ? These people confessed Him, and crucified Him within a week. Is it an ancient crime ? Do we never act in similar fashion ? Do we not pay our homage to Him on the Sunday, and then crucify Him during the week ? We sing in church, “Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ” ; but do we not by our actions outside often say, “We will not have this man to reign over us ?” And yet it is obedience Christ wants. “Why call ye Me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say ? He that hath My commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me.” Are we, then, loyal subjects ? The Lord is before us, and I say, “Behold your King ! Your King ; the only Being Who has authority to rule and a right to your obedience.” And I ask you, what will you do with your King ? Will you say, “Away with

The Triumphal Entry

Him ! " Or will you say with me, and mean it **Mark xi.**
when you say it, **I-10.**

" My gracious Lord, I own Thy right
To every service I can pay,
And call it my supreme delight
To hear Thy dictates, and obey."

VI

THE BARREN FIG-TREE : DIFFICULTIES

"And Jesus entered into Jerusalem, and into the temple : and when He had looked round about upon all things, and now the eventide was come, He went out unto Bethany with the twelve. And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany, He was hungry : And seeing a fig-tree afar off having leaves, He came, if haply He might find any thing thereon : and when He came to it, He found nothing but leaves ; for the time of figs was not yet. And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And His disciples heard it."—MARK xi. 11-14.

Mark xi. BEFORE discussing the difficult passage which tells the story of the barren fig-tree, let us look at verse 11, in which Mark tells us what happened after our Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem. "And He entered into Jerusalem," says the Evangelist, "into the Temple." "Into the Temple," surely the terminus of the procession is significant. It is significant as to the nature of Christ's Kingdom, and the character of His Kingship. Had it been an earthly kingdom our Lord was set upon establishing, had it been Herod's or Cæsar's throne He wished to occupy, He would have marched, not to the Temple, but to the castle or the procurator's palace. But Jesus had no designs against Cæsar's soldiers ; no

I I - I 4 .

The Visit to
the Temple.

The Barren Fig-Tree : Difficulties

wish to sit in Pilate's or Herod's room ; and so He **Mark xi.** bent His steps, not to the palace, but to the Temple. **11-14.** The Temple was the shrine and centre of the Jewish —**Its** religion. By marching on the day on which He was **Import.** acclaimed as King straight to the Temple, our Lord declared to the world that it was a spiritual kingdom He came to establish, and it was in men's hearts He desired to reign. When He reached the Temple, He "looked round about upon all things." He cast a searching, scrutinising glance upon all that was taking place in the Temple precincts. He saw much that grieved and pained Him, and on the morrow, as we shall see, He took sharp and drastic action. But on the day of His entry He contented Himself with this all-embracing gaze. He "looked round about upon all things."

How full of solemn suggestion a little phrase like **The** **Searching** **Look.** this is ! The Lord still visits His temple ! He comes to visit His Father's house. And when He comes nothing escapes His notice. I wonder what it is He sees. He sees no one buying or selling. There are no seats of the moneychangers to be overthrown. And yet He may see things equally incongruous with the purpose of a house of God. His house is a house of prayer. But is it the prayerful and believing spirit Christ always sees ? Do we never bring the proud and unforgiving spirit with us ? Do not foolish and sometimes foul thoughts go racing through our minds even in a sacred place like this ? Are we not often busy with worldly plans and cares, while to outward appearance engaged in worship ? And by bringing these things

Mark xi. with us into the house of God we desecrate it just as badly as did these Jews who chaffered and haggled in the Temple courts. And whatever we bring with us our Lord sees. The foolish thought, the evil temper, the wandering imagination, the unholy desire, nothing escapes His notice. Every time we gather in church, the Lord is present too, and He “looks round about upon all things.” I never think of that solemn, searching, scrutinising gaze without feeling constrained to take the Psalmist’s prayer on my lips and to say, “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer” (xix. 14). With that solemn and searching glance our Lord contented Himself on the day of His entry ; for apparently, as His lowly procession had made its way down Olivet and into Jerusalem, the day had waned ; and as it was now eventide, He went out into Bethany—out of the reach of His bitter foes, to the restfulness and quiet of Martha and Mary’s house.

Returning to Jerusalem. But Jerusalem was to be the scene of His labours during these last few days. He had a witness to bear, and at all risks and costs it must be borne. So, when the next morning comes, He takes the journey to Jerusalem once more. And on the way He realised He was faint and hungry. It is possible He had risen a great while before day, to seek the Father’s face in prayer ; and absorbed in communion with God He had clean forgotten His physical necessities. That was often the case with Jesus. Again and again it happened that He had

The Barren Fig-Tree : Difficulties

no leisure so much as to eat. But the needs of the **Mark xi.** body cannot for long be neglected. And so Jesus, **11-14.** lifted in the exaltation of His spirit above any sense of need, suddenly realised that He was going to face a long and trying day in Jerusalem, and He was faint and spent almost before it began.

"When they were come out from Bethany He — "He Hungered." (ver. 12). Does that seem a trivial thing? Does it almost seem derogatory to the dignity of Christ to mention a fact like that? Personally, I am grateful for it. It makes one realise how truly Jesus was man, and how completely He was touched with the feeling of our infirmities. "He hungered." And ahead of Him on the road He saw a fig-tree, which promised the sustenance He needed; for although it was not the **The Barren Fig-Tree.** regular season of figs, this particular tree was in full leaf, and in the fig-tree, we are told, fruitage precedes leafage. But when Jesus reached it He found that the tree bore nothing but leaves. All that show of foliage was a cheat and a delusion. There was not a fig on the whole tree. And so our Lord "answered" (note the word; it is as if the tree had refused to give fruit), and said unto it, "No man eat fruit from thee henceforward for ever" (ver. 14). The disciples heard the sentence; and next morning, as they were making their way again into the city, they saw that the barren fig-tree had withered away.

Now certain obvious difficulties are raised by this **Difficulties** story. (1) The first and most obvious is concerned **(1) Our Lord's Knowledge.** with Christ's knowledge. Did our Lord really expect Knowledge.

Mark xi. to find fruit on the tree? Was He really ignorant that it was a barren tree? This was the difficulty that gave most trouble to ancient commentators. To admit ignorance seemed to them equivalent to denying our Lord's perfection. "If He really sought fruit," says Augustine, "He erred." And so they resort to various shifts to reconcile our Lord's pretended ignorance with His honesty. Their explanations amount practically to this—that He only feigned to seek the fruit. The whole action, we are told, was symbolic; it was a "wrought" parable. The entire episode was simply meant to teach the lesson that large professions without practice, as illustrated in the case of the Jewish nation, inevitably come under the judgment and condemnation of God. Many prefer, however, the simple explanation of our Lord's conduct in connection with this fig-tree, namely, that He did not know it was barren. It was not the regular season for figs, Mark says. But our Lord inferred from its luxuriant leafage that there were sure to be figs upon it. It is urged that this interpretation in no way detracts from His Divinity (for that rests in the last resort upon His sinless life and His power to impart life to others); but that it does help to make His humanity a more real and genuine thing.

Difficulties : (2) A further difficulty is felt by some who hold
The Tree not a Moral Agent. that a tree, not being a moral agent, not being capable either of good or of evil, ought not to have been punished. But we answer the objection by the language we use of trees. We talk of "good"

The Barren Fig-Tree : Difficulties

trees and "bad" trees. We say such and such a *Mark xi.* tree "ought" to bear well, while another perhaps *11-14.* cannot be "expected" to do much. That is to say, we attribute moral qualities to trees, and ourselves pass judgment upon them. All of which, again, implies that there is a certain analogy between trees and men. Indeed, our Lord more than once employs the analogy. In one familiar parable, for instance, He compares Israel to a barren fig-tree, which is only spared through the importunity of the gardener who begged for another year of grace. So now it was Israel—so rich in professions, so poor in practice—that He saw symbolised in that barren tree, and when He pronounced judgment upon it, it was Israel that He had in mind. It was a solemn warning to His countrymen of the doom that would surely fall upon them, if they satisfied themselves with empty professions, and brought forth no fruits meet for repentance. The physical injury was intended to teach a great spiritual lesson.

(3) But behind all this, there lies a feeling that *Difficulties : The Severity of our Lord.* judgment of this kind is alien from the spirit of Christ. The tendency of our own day is to ignore every suggestion of sternness and austerity in the character of our Lord. We emphasise the kindly, gracious aspects of our Lord's character. "Gentle Jesus," we call Him. "A bruised reed He will not break," we say of Him, "and smoking flax He will not quench." We delight to remember that He came to seek and to save the lost, and that He was the friend of publicans and sinners. And all this is, of course, quite true. But there is another aspect

Mark xi. of our Lord's character. He is not merely gentle and kind ; He is also majestic and austere. He is not only Saviour ; He is also Judge. I will admit, if you like, that judgment is strange work, distasteful work to Him. "Curse a fig-tree ?" so Dr Halley used to begin a great sermon of His on this incident. "Curse a fig-tree ? 'Tisn't like Him." I grant it is not like Him. It is not work in which He takes delight. He came to save men's lives, not to destroy them.

—But He is Judge as well as Saviour. But we are blind to whole tracts of the New Testament teaching if we ignore the fact that Christ is Judge as well as Saviour. He does not bear the sword in vain. We are not exalting Christ, we are doing a grave wrong to men, if we induce them to believe that Jesus is mere indulgent good-nature, and that He can view sin and wrong with easy indifference. And I am not sure that our over-emphasis on the gentleness and kindness of Jesus has not already inflicted that grave wrong upon men. "No one is afraid of God now," said Dr Dale to Dr Berry one day.

To a large extent Dr Dale's remark remains true. The sense of God's holiness and purity has been lost and submerged in the sense of, I will not say His love, but His good-nature. And the result is that the edge has gone from our sense of sin, and our hatred of it. But the fear of the Lord remains to this day the beginning of wisdom. And an incident like this teaches us that neglected truth of the fear of God. Men may banish the "wrath of the Lamb" from thought and speech. But, in spite of our silence, that "wrath" remains a reality.

The Barren Fig-Tree : Difficulties

In parable it is here in the cursing of this barren **Mark xi.**
fig-tree.

II-14.

“Behold, then,” says St Paul, “the goodness and God’s Goodness and Severity of God” (Rom. xi. 22). The goodness and Severity! We talk much, as a rule, about the goodness, and say nothing about the severity. But, as a matter of fact, there can be no goodness apart from severity. The indulgent father, the father who is never severe, the father who never steals his heart to punish, is not a good father. He is a weak father and ■ foolish father, and from the child’s standpoint, a bad father. In the same way exactly ■ God who winked at and never punished sin would not be a good God. He would not be good in Himself; for good-nature is not the same as goodness. And He certainly would not be good towards men. I can conceive of nothing more fatal to human souls than that God should allow them to sin on without penalty or rebuke. By ignoring the austere and severe aspects of our Lord’s character, we really sacrifice His holiness and perfection. Moreover, paradoxical as it may sound at first, it is a fact that we sacrifice the very kindness and love of Christ, if we ignore His severity. “Thy chastisements are love,” says our familiar hymn. So they are. They are the final and consummate proof of love.

Love is seen even in the very severity of this A Last action. He had already compared Israel to a Appeal. persistently barren tree. They made loud professions of religion; they had all the outward parade of it; they offered sacrifices and made long prayers, but the genuine effects of religion—

Mark xi. obedience, mercy, love and truth—were conspicuous by their absence. They were like this fig-tree, with a profusion of leafage, but no fruit. And by this act of blighting the barren fig-tree our Lord made a kind of last appeal, and gave a kind of final warning to Israel. He inflicted this act of penal justice upon this tree, that thereby barren Israel might be warned to escape the wrath to come. He destroyed a fig-tree that He might save men's souls.

The Pity of the Lord.

The yearning pity of the Lord shines out of an act like this. There was an intention of saving grace at the very heart of it. This is the one miracle of judgment our Lord ever performed. And when He felt constrained to assert the holiness and righteousness of God, He did not do it, Archbishop Trench remarks, like Moses and Elijah, at the expense of the lives of many men ; but only at the cost of a single, unfeeling tree. His miracles of help and healing were numberless, and on men ; His miracle of judgment was but one, and on a tree. Behold the “goodness and severity” of the Lord !

—And His Solemn Warning..

And yet, though we may assuredly see love and kindness shining through it, the story is a solemn story. Let us not ignore its austere and searching teaching. Christ is Judge as well as Saviour. He is full of patient and seeking love for the sinner, but He burns with a flame of holy wrath against sin. And sooner or later the judgment upon sin will fall. There are limits to the patience even of the patient Christ. The blow fell upon

The Barren Fig-Tree : Difficulties

Israel, rebellious and barren Israel, in shattering **Mark xi.** fashion, some thirty years later, when the Lord they **11-14.** had rejected, by the hand of the Roman power, broke the nation in pieces like a potter's vessel. And the sin that provokes judgment need not be some great and positive offence. It is barrenness that incurs the doom mentioned in the story. "Inasmuch as ye did it not," that was the charge. "Depart from Me," that was the doom. Let us "kiss the son, lest He be angry, and ye perish in the way. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him" (Psa. ii. 12).

VII

THE BARREN FIG-TREE : MESSAGES

" And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany, He was hungry : And seeing a fig-tree afar off having leaves, He came, if haply He might find any thing thereon : and when He came to it, He found nothing but leaves ; for the time of figs was not yet. And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And His disciples heard it. And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig-tree dried up from the roots. And Peter calling to remembrance said unto Him, Master, behold, the fig-tree which Thou cursedst is withered away. And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea ; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass ; he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any : that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses."—MARK xi. 12-14, 20-25.

Mark xi.
12-14,
20-25.
Christ as
Judge.

So much for the difficulties associated with this story of the barren fig-tree. Now let us deal with the solemn teaching of the story itself. I have said that this incident revealed Jesus in His capacity as Judge. Judgment is Christ's prerogative. " The Father hath given all judgment unto the Son,"

The Barren Fig-Tree : Messages

says John (John v. 22). "We must all be made **Mark xi.** manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ," says **12-14,** St Paul, "that each one may receive the things **20-25.** done in the body, according to what we hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor. v. 10). While Jesus Himself asserts that before Him as Judge all the nations shall be gathered ; and it is His judgment that sets the sheep on His right hand, and the goats on His left. Thus the uniform witness of Holy Writ is that Christ is Judge as well as Saviour. Whoever ignores this aspect of our Lord's office shuts his eyes to whole tracts of New Testament teaching.

But this incident does more than proclaim the **Principles of** fact that Jesus Christ is Judge. It also sets forth **His Judgment.** the principles of His judgment, showing us the things that fall under our Lord's condemnation, and suggesting the penalties He inflicts. I have said that it was the Jewish people our Lord saw symbolised in this barren fig-tree ; and it is their judgment which in parable is set forth in this incident. But our Lord's judgments are never arbitrary or casual ; they are based on great principles ; they are governed by eternal law. So that from any individual case we are justified in deducting a general rule ; and we may be sure that though this is primarily a judgment upon the Jews, the principles embodied in it are valid for all time.

Observe first that barrenness is ■ sin. That was **Barrenness—
a Sin.** the fault of this tree. It was not that it was spoiling the landscape by its ugly appearance, or blighting

Mark xi.
12-14,
20-25.

all vegetation near by its poisonous exhalations. As a matter of fact, it was doing no harm, and it was fair to look upon. It was barren ; that was all. It was doing nothing. It was failing to fulfil the true end of its existence. And for that it was condemned. It seems to me we need to broaden our conceptions of what sin is. We are apt to cherish a narrow, mechanical, external idea of sin. "Sinner," as we commonly understand the word, means someone who has committed a glaring, gross, and open offence. To be a sinner in the eyes of most people, a man must have done something positively shameful and wicked. But if we turn to a story like this, its first and most obvious lesson is that barrenness is a sin. A man need not do anything openly wicked in order to come under the condemnation of Christ. He comes under that condemnation if he does nothing, if he is simply barren and useless.

The
Repeated
Warning.

When I read the instances of judgment given to us in the Gospels, I find that in nearly every case the men so condemned were condemned not because of any positive harm they had done, but because, like this fig-tree, they had done nothing. Take the judgment picture as given to us by our Lord in Matt. xxv. Upon some was pronounced this terrible judgment, "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire." What awful wickedness had they perpetrated to merit a doom like that ? Nothing. It was not what they had done ; it was what they had not done. There were at their doors hungry people to be fed, naked people to be clothed, thirsty

The Barren Fig-Tree : Messages

people to be refreshed, sick people to be visited and Mark xi. comforted—and they had done nothing. “ Inas- 12-14,
much as ye did it not . . . depart from Me, ye 20-25.
cursed.” Take the parable of the talents. Upon The Penalty
one of his servants the householder pronounces this
sentence, “ Cast ye out the unprofitable servant
into the outer darkness : there shall be the weeping
and gnashing of teeth ” (Matt. xxv. 30). What
enormity had this servant committed ? Had he
defrauded his lord, and robbed him of his money ?
No ; for when his lord came back he returned to
him the talent he had originally received. Again,
it was not a case of what he had done ; it was a case
of what he had not done. His lord had given him
a talent to trade with, but instead of using it, he
hid the talent in the earth and did nothing. Take
the story of Dives. “ In Hades he lifted up his
eyes being in torments ” (Luke xvii. 23). What
awful and monstrous sin had Dives committed, to
find himself at the last in that flame ? It is not
charged against him that he had committed obvious
sin. Possibly he had lived what would be con-
sidered an eminently respectable life. I should not
be surprised if he had had a large funeral, and if the
local Rabbi pronounced a eulogy over his coffin,
extolling the virtues of the dead man. What, then,
had he done, to be thus “ in torments ” ? Again,
it was not a case of what he had done ; it was a case
of what he had not done. Lazarus had lain at his
gate in his poverty and sores day after day, and this
rich man, clothed in purple and fine linen, and faring
sumptuously every day, had done nothing for him.

Mark xi.

12-14,

20-25.

**A Warning
Still Needed.**

We miss, then, the entire point of our Lord's repeated teaching, unless we see that barrenness is a damning sin. Of many we need not fear that they will ever stand convicted of open and flagrant crime. Their danger is of another kind ; it is the sin of barrenness. We are sent here to this world for a purpose. The Westminster Catechism expresses it this way, "The chief end of man is to glorify God." And we glorify God as our Master did, by lives of usefulness and service. Here, then, is the matter that will decide our destiny. Are we fulfilling the purpose God had in mind ? Are we going about doing good ? Failure in this brings the condemnation upon us, "The God in Whose hand thy breath is, and Whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified" (Dan. vi. 23). So ran the reason given to a Babylonian king for the doom that was about to fall upon him.

**Where is
our Fruit ?**

How do we stand such a test ? Do we bear the fruits of righteousness ? Or are we barren trees ? "The fruit of the Spirit," says the Apostle, "is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, temperance" (Gal. v. 22, 23). Are such fruits seen in us ? Are we living lives of active and positive beneficence ? It is not for me or any other man to judge, but one cannot help feeling that there are a large number of "barren trees" about. By worldly standards, these people live lives respectable enough ; but they are colourless, ineffective, useless. It is not that they do much positive harm, but rather that in a world full of need and misery and sin, they do nothing.

The Barren Fig-Tree : Messages

Upon all such fruitless, useless, barren lives the Mark xi.
Divine judgment will fall.

12-14,

20-25.

The next truth I find suggested in this story is this—that barrenness may exist where there is much promise of fruit. That was the characteristic of this particular fig-tree ; there was much promise, but no performance. There was any amount of leafage, but not a single fig. The tree was not only barren, it was deceptive and false into the bargain. And this tree which promised so fair, but was so barren, reminded our Lord, as I have said, of the people of Israel. There was much of the show and parade of religion in Judæa. The Temple smoked with sacrifices. Priests were ever busy at the altars. The people ceaselessly trod its courts. One type of Jew, condemned by our Lord, was wont, if I may so put it, to advertise his religion. He tithed his mint and anise and cummin. He stood at the corner of the streets and made long prayers. He made broad his phylacteries. By his actions and observances he called the world's attention to himself, and said, "I am a religious man." He was like this fig-tree, there was any amount of profession and promise, but the real thing was conspicuous by its absence. Mercy and truth were sadly to seek. These very men, so scrupulous about the washing of pots and pans and brazen vessels, carried within them foul and unclean hearts. These very men who stood at the corners of the streets and made long prayers were not above devouring widows' houses. All through their lives this contradiction ran. They served God with their

St Mark x. 32—xiii. 37

Mark xi. lips, but their hearts were far from Him. They sacrificed, but did not obey. They were like this tree, nothing but leaves.
12-14,
20-25.

**A Modern
Evil.**

And still we find this same humbling phenomenon, barrenness where there is profusion of promise. Fruitless lives are to be found even amongst those who profess to be followers of Jesus. One of the sights that Interpreter pointed out in his garden to Christiana and her children was that of a “tree whose inside was all rotten and gone, yet it grew and had leaves.” Then said Mercy, “What is this ? ” “This Tree,” said Interpreter, “whose outside is fair, and whose inside is rotten, it is to which many may be compared that are in the garden of God, who with their mouths speak high in behalf of God, but in deed will do nothing for Him ; whose leaves are fair, but their hearts good for nothing, but to be tinder for the devil’s tinder-box.” And that is just the old Dreamer’s way of stating the moral of this tree, that had abundance of leaves but nothing else. There are men and women, alas, many of them, who are all leaf, and no fruit. Church membership, attendance at public worship, participation in the Holy Communion, these are the leaves. But where is the fruit ? There is nothing in their lives to demonstrate the reality of their faith. Their profession often leaves their life untouched. It all ends with the profession and the promise. It is a case of “nothing but leaves.” Now, a life all barren is bad enough; but a life that makes promise, and yet remains barren, is worse still ; for it adds the

The Barren Fig-Tree : Messages

sin of falsity to the sin of barrenness. Or, to put **Mark xi.** it in a slightly different form, ■ fruitless life is bad **12-14,** enough ; but a fruitless life on the part of a pro- **20-25.** fessing Christian is the worst of all. Better make no profession than make a profession without practice.

The biggest obstacle to religion to-day is not the man who is frankly not a Christian, but the man who says he is a Christian and does not live like one. Profession without practice brings the whole of religion into contempt. It causes the name of God to be blasphemed. We do well, there- How is it with us ? fore, frankly to ask ourselves, Have we the power of godliness as well as the form ? Do we love Christ as well as profess Him ? Or does it all end with the profession ?

“ Either put on courage, or put off the name of Alexander,” said that great monarch to ■ soldier who was showing signs of cowardice in one of his battles. So I say, “ Either put on Christ, or put off the name of Christian.” To profess Christ and to live for self, is not simply to be fruitless, but to be hypocrites into the bargain. Profession without practice, leaves without fruit, avail nothing with God. “ Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven ” (Matt. vii. 21).

Now mark the doom of barrenness, as exemplified in this incident. “ No man eat fruit from thee henceforward for ever ” (ver. 14), said our Lord. And in the morning the disciples noticed that the

Mark xi. “fig-tree was withered away from the roots.”
14-12, The punishment of barrenness, as Dr Glover says,
20-25. was judicial barrenness. Or, to put it in less technical language, the punishment of this fig-tree that refused to bear fruit was permanent inability to bear fruit. All this is neither arbitrary nor capricious, but in strictest accord with the principles of judgment, as we see them at work all about us.

The Law of Atrophy. There are two laws with whose working we are quite familiar, which are illustrated in our Lord’s judgment on the fig-tree. They are closely connected with each other, indeed, may be regarded as complementary to each other. The first—shall I call it the law of atrophy?—is one of the observed laws of science, that powers and faculties unused, decay and perish. Muscles, *e.g.* unexercised, grow limp and flabby. The condition of retaining a faculty is its use. Now that is true in higher regions than the physical. The condition of retaining the spirit of generosity is the exercise of generosity. The condition of retaining the spirit of unselfishness is the practice of unselfishness. The man who never does a generous deed soon loses the capacity for generosity. The man who never does an unselfish deed loses the very power to be unselfish. Neglect is punished by loss. That is the principle illustrated in the doom of this tree. It refused to bear fruit; it lost the power of bearing fruit. “Henceforth no man eat fruit from thee for ever.”

The Law of Permanence. The second law I see illustrated is the law of permanence. It is the positive side of the law of

The Barren Fig-Tree: Messages

atrophy. We lose what we fail to use. But what **Mark xi.** we choose and practise that we tend permanently **12-14,** to become. This fruitless tree, what was its punishment? Permanent fruitlessness. It is a stern and awful law. But it is one whose working we see on every hand. It is the law set forth in that sequence, which says that actions repeated become habits, habits long continued become character, and character settles destiny. The man who does mean and miserly actions tends to become permanent miserly; the man who acts selfishly becomes selfish in the very grain of his nature; the man who allows himself to brood over foul and filthy things becomes filthy in the very make. Character is always tending to permanence. I can conceive no doom more awful than that a man should be permanently what he has made himself. And that is the principle of the Divine judgment. "He that is unrighteous, let him do unrighteousness still; and he that is filthy, let him be made filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him do righteousness still" (Rev. xxii. 11). In a sense Christ's judgment is simply the ratification of our own choice. We become permanently what we ourselves choose to be.

"And the disciples heard it," says St Mark, **The Responsibility of Hearing.** "heard," that is, the sentence pronounced upon the barren tree; taking in not merely the words, but, then or later, the solemn import of them.

Now, we ourselves have heard with our ears once again this story of the barren fig-tree. Have we heard it with the ears of the soul? Have we

St Mark x. 32—xiii. 37

Mark xi. listened to and received its solemn warning? “If ye know these things,” said our Lord, “happy are ye if ye do them.” “Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; and so shall ye be My disciples” (John xv. 8). If we have “heard” this solemn story aright, we shall ask God for His enriching and life-giving Spirit, we shall pray that that Spirit may come upon us, and that our barrenness may rejoice to own His fertilising power. For the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace goodness, kindness, meekness, temperance; and against such there is no law, no judgment, no doom; no, but the “Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”

VIII

THE CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE

"And they come to Jerusalem: and Jesus went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold doves; and would not suffer that any man should carry any vessel through the temple. And He taught, saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves. And the scribes and chief priests heard it, and sought how they might destroy him: for they feared him, because all the people was astonished at his doctrine."

—MARK xi. 15-18.

ON the day that our Lord made His entry in lowly *Mark xi.* state into Jerusalem, He went straight to the *15-18.* Temple; for it was not Caesar's or Herod's throne ^{The} that He sought. The empire He came to establish ^{Scrutiny of} the Temple. was not material, but spiritual. His mission was not political; it was religious. Our Lord, however, took no action of any sort on His visit to the Temple, on the day of His triumphal entry. He contented Himself with a sweeping and searching scrutiny of the things that were being done within its precincts. "He looked round about upon all things." The look was, no doubt, with a view to action. But it was eventide, and the action itself was postponed

St Mark x. 32—xiii. 37

Mark xi. 15-18. until the next day. “ When He had looked round about upon all things, it being now eventide, He went out unto Bethany with the Twelve ” (ver. 11).

The Things Seen.

The Reason for the Traffic.

Now, what was it our Lord saw when He looked round about upon all things ? To put it in a word, He saw the Temple desecrated. There were men chaffering and haggling, cheating and overreaching one another in the very house of God. We remember, of course, that it was not a case of general trafficking ; all the buying and selling that went on was with a view to the requirements of the Temple worship. Jews came up to worship at the Temple from all parts of Palestine, from all parts of the world. You can see how inconvenient, even how impossible, it would be for them to bring their sacrifices with them. Take the Passover sacrifice. Pilgrims came flocking in their thousands and tens of thousands for that great feast. It would have been the extremity of inconvenience if they had had to bring the sacrificial lamb along with them. So, to meet their convenience, arrangements were made whereby the pilgrims could purchase the lambs they needed, in Jerusalem, or indeed in the Temple itself. It was the same with the money-changing. Jews coming from foreign countries would naturally be provided with the money of those countries. But the Temple tax had to be paid in Jewish coin. So again, to meet their convenience money-changers attended in the Temple precincts, to exchange the diverse sorts of money the pilgrims brought for the Jewish half-shekel.

—Its Scene. Further, we are not to think of this traffic as

The Cleansing of the Temple

taking place in the shrine itself. Around the ^{Mark xi.} Temple there were a series of courts, and the largest ^{15-18.} and the outermost of these was the Court of the Gentiles. It was in this great Court of the Gentiles that the buying and selling took place. The Jew scarcely, perhaps, reckoned this court as a holy place. It was almost a profane place, for the uncircumcised Gentile could enter into it. The probability is that the Jew would have revolted in horror from the idea of permitting trafficking in the court where he himself worshipped ; but he did not think that it mattered very much what happened in the Court of the Gentiles.

All this is not by way of excuse for the conduct ^{The Real Offence.} of the Jews, but in order that we may see just wherein their offence lay. I do not think it was the mere buying and selling and money-changing that desecrated the Temple. If the motive of these actions had been a genuine desire to meet the convenience of the pilgrims, and to minister to their necessities, if kindness and a spirit of helpfulness lay behind the buying and selling, I do not think that our Lord would have blazed up in holy anger against it, nor would He have accused those who engaged in it of turning His Father's house into a den of robbers.

In our Lord's sight actions were sacred or profane ^{The Sacred and the Secular : How Distinguished.} according to the spirit that prompted them. We have ourselves a rough and mechanical division of things into things secular and sacred. A hymn, for instance, is a sacred thing ; a speech is a secular thing. But in Christ's sight the hymn may be a

St Mark x. 32—xiii. 37

Mark xi. secular thing, and the speech the sacred thing. An **15-18.** irreligious spirit makes the most sacred hymn a profane thing ; a worshipful spirit makes a speech even on a secular theme a religious exercise. Now there is nothing more secular from our narrow point of view than buying and selling. But even buying and selling can be translated into Divine service. We all of us believe that, or else there is but a poor look out for those engaged in commerce. Supposing, then, that these people buying and selling in the Temple courts had been animated solely by the desire to help the pilgrims from all parts of the world, do you think that He Who said that God wanted mercy, and not sacrifice, Who in the very next chapter endorses the scribes' declaration that to love God and to love one's neighbour as oneself is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices, do you think that He would have denounced them as "robbers," and driven them in holy wrath out of the Temple precincts ? I tell you nay. I do not think He would have rebuked them at all. Such buying and selling would have been converted into Divine service, and would not have been incongruous, even in a place set apart for prayer.

The Temple-
Market Per-
verted.

It was not, then, the buying and the selling that in itself was wrong ; it was the spirit in which it was carried on. Originally instituted to meet the convenience of the pilgrims, it was carried on from motives of cupidity and greed. The priests who permitted the traffic no longer thought of the pilgrims and their needs ; they thought only of

The Cleansing of the Temple

their own gains. The sale of animals for sacrifice **Mark xi.** became a source of profit. The exchange of money **15-18.** became an opportunity for extorting an oppressive discount. This market in the Temple, instead of being a help, became a burden to the worshipper. The sordid, mercenary spirit of the priests turned everything, as Dr Salmond says, to "desecration, profanity, greed and fraud." It was this ugly and greedy spirit that stirred our Lord to indignation. They turned the very service of the Lord into an oppression. They turned the worship of the Temple into a way of gain. They brought the spirit of the world in its basest and foulest form right into the Holy Place. This it was that defiled the Temple. They were guilty of cheating and defrauding and oppression in the name of religion. Literally, they turned the house of prayer into "a den of robbers."

All this has its most solemn teaching for us to-day. We should never dream of setting up a cattle-market or even a shop within sacred precincts, though in these days men are often puzzled as to what is permissible and what is not permissible in buildings set apart for the worship of God. My own strong feeling is that it is conducive to the spirit of worship to preserve these buildings entirely for worship, though I cannot assert that those who put them to other uses are wrong. But, even if we keep them rigidly and absolutely for worship, we may yet desecrate and pollute them. For, as I have tried to point out, the real character of an action is decided by the spirit in which we do it. You may have profane hymn-singing and secular preaching. God asks to

Houses of
God misused.

St Mark x. 32—xiii. 37

Mark xi. be worshipped “in spirit and in truth,” but when
15-18. we come together, and assume the form of worship while our hearts are all the while far away from God and holy things; when we sit in pews, and allow our minds to busy themselves with worldly affairs; when we bring pride, and jealousy, and uncharitableness with us; when we allow coarse and base and foul thoughts to go coursing through our minds, we are as really and truly polluting God’s house as were these traffickers who chaffered and haggled in the Temple precincts. In the ultimate resort it is the sinful heart that is the real cause of the pollution. And there is one prayer we may well offer whenever we come up to God’s house, and that is, “O God! make clean our hearts within us,” for holiness becometh God’s house for ever.

The Jew, the Gentile—and Jesus Christ. Our Lord’s action, then, was first of all a condemnation of the evil spirit of greed that turned religion into a source of profit. In the second place, it was a protest against the differentiation made between the sacredness of the court in which the Jews themselves worshipped, and that in which the Gentiles worshipped. By turning the Court of the Gentiles into a cattle-market they as good as labelled it as a profane place. They said, in effect, that it did not much matter what was transacted there. It was an illustration in action of the traditional Jewish contempt for the Gentile. But Jesus knew no distinction between Jew and Gentile. Each was equally dear to the heart of God. The Temple, as He said, was a “house of prayer for all

The Cleansing of the Temple

the nations." In God's great house Gentile and Mark xi. Jew were equally welcome, and the place where 15-18. the Gentiles worshipped was every whit as sacred as the inner court where the Jews performed their devotions. And so He swept the dealers out of the Court of the Gentiles, and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold the doves, and thereby declared their acceptance with God and their equal rights with the Jews. There was as little room in the house of God for the spirit of religious pride as for the spirit of avarice and greed. The presence of either was a desecration of the Holy Place. Both came under the judgment of our Lord when He swept this mob of traders out of the Court of the Gentiles, saying, "Is it not written, My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations ? but ye have made it a den of robbers " (ver. 17).

Having thus pointed out the sins which came under the lash of our Lord's condemnation, let us note some lessons which the incident as a whole is calculated to teach.

First of all, observe the royal bearing of Jesus The Sovereignty throughout this incident. The day previous the of Christ. crowds had acclaimed Him as King, and He had gone to the Temple in triumph, as if to His royal seat. In this incident He proceeds to exercise His royal authority : He acts as King. He proclaims Himself Master and Lord in the Temple. "The Lord," it had been said by one of the prophets, "shall suddenly come to His Temple." By driving these traffickers helter-skelter out of the sacred courts

St Mark x. 32—xiii. 37

Mark xi. 15-18. Jesus proclaimed Himself the long-awaited King of Jewish expectation. All who witnessed the incident knew exactly what it meant. It was the Lord laying claim to His Messiahship. He had kept it hidden and secret in Galilee. But in Jerusalem, and especially during this last week, He publicly and repeatedly declared it. Notice, too, how He speaks of the Temple. When He purged it of its desecrations at the commencement of His career, He spoke of it as His "Father's house." But see how He speaks of it now. "My house shall be called a house of prayer." My house ! "By what authority doest Thou these things ?" the chief priests asked of Him. It was a proper question to ask. For no mere man had a right to act as if he were Lord of the Temple, and no mere man had a right to speak of the Temple as "My house."

The Moral Authority of Christ.

Notice again what an illustration we have here of the moral authority of the Lord Jesus Christ ! He was only one man. There were scores, possibly more, of these traffickers and money-changers. And yet before this one man unarmed this mob of men fled in something like abject panic. Jesus was vested with no external authority. He wore no badge of office. To outward appearance He was only a Galilean peasant—that and nothing more. How came these men to flee from before Him ? There was a double reason. This is the first, sin is always weakness. Men who know they are in the wrong often show themselves timid in the face of righteousness. "Conscience doth make

The Cleansing of the Temple

cowards of us all." These men knew they were **Mark xi.** doing a wrong, an indefensible thing. And so, **15-18.** when Jesus challenged them, not ■ man dare stand his ground. But this is more than an illustration of the weakness of evil—it is also an illustration of the moral authority of Jesus. There was a purity and holiness in His very appearance before which evil could not stand. "Who may abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth?" (Mal. iii. 2), the prophet asks. Not these traffickers and money-changers, caught in the very act of desecrating God's house. They fled before Him, conscience-stricken and ashamed.

We know something of this moral authority in **Moral Authority in Daily Life.** every-day life. There was a shameful scene in our House of Commons some years ago, when, in the heat of party passion, members came to blows. The Chairman of Committees was in charge of the House when the storm broke. But he was powerless to quell it. So some one sent in a hurry for Speaker Peel. When he appeared, and looked in his own grave and dignified way upon the ugly scene, the men who had forgotten themselves, subdued by not so much the official as the moral authority of the Speaker, shrank like whipped school-boys to their places. There is immense moral authority in character. Men instinctively yield to it. But no one had it in such pre-eminent degree as Jesus. The crowd who brought before Him that wretched woman whom they had discovered in sin, stole away one by one, unable to bear the scrutiny of those clear eyes. The soldiers who came to seize

St Mark x. 32—xiii. 37

Mark xi. Him went backward, and fell to the ground.
15-18. These traffickers fled pell-mell before Him. The ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, “but are like chaff which the wind driveth away” (Psa. i. 4).

The Holy Indignation of Christ.

Observe, again, the holy indignation of Jesus Christ, as illustrated in this incident. He was filled with just anger against these men who brought their avarice and greed into the Holy Place and turned God’s house into a den of robbers. In our conceptions of Jesus we must make room for indignation and anger. He was not gentle or tolerant towards persistent and continued sin; more especially towards the sin of those who inflicted wrong upon their fellows. It is towards the *penitent* sinner that Christ is all tenderness and pity.

Cleansing Temple and Church.

Christ, then, has just proclaimed His Kingship, and the first act of His reign, so to speak, is to cleanse the Temple. Surely the action is suggestive of the cleansing of His Church. For the Church is the instrument through which Christ will establish His Kingdom; but a corrupt and tainted Church is useless for such a work. When there is a corrupt Church and a corrupt ministry, you get a corrupt people. The wickedness of the sons of Eli made men abhor the offering of the Lord. And it is so still. Weakness, corruption, worldliness in the Church itself set religion at a discount amongst the people; and so judgment must begin at the House of God. Has not all this its meaning for our own time? Things are slack amongst us. Somehow or other religion seems to be losing its hold. The progress

The Cleansing of the Temple

of the Kingdom is arrested. Can it be that the **Mark xi.** fault lies with the Church ? Have things crept **15-18.** into the Church which have destroyed its effectiveness and weakened its power ? We are constantly praying for a revival. Perhaps it is we ourselves who need to be cleansed and purified. Is it not a fact that doubts and timidities have crept into our speech ? Is it not a fact that our prayers are often lifeless, and our enthusiasm cold ? Is it not a fact that we have condescended to some perilously worldly methods in our efforts to win what we call success ? And is it not a fact that by our mutual jealousies and strife we oftentimes make religion a laughing-stock to the world without ?

What we need to-day is that our Lord should ^{Our Need To-day.} come and cleanse His Church of these things that defile her in the eyes of men, and make vain all her efforts. A doubtful Church, a divided Church, a worldly Church is a powerless Church. A cleansing and purification of the Church is our sorest need. Let us all unite in the prayer that God will inspire continually the universal Church with the spirit of truth, unity, and concord ; let us beg of Him that all they that do confess His holy name may agree in the truth of His Holy Word and live in unity and godly love. For a cleansed, redeemed and sanctified Church means a converted and rejuvenated world.

IX

PRAYER AND ITS POWER

" And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea ; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass ; he shall have whatsoever he saith."—MARK xi. 22, 23.

**Mark xi.
22, 23.**
**An Unex-
pected
Reply.**

ON the Tuesday morning of that eventful week, when again our Lord and His followers made their way to Jerusalem, Peter noticed that the once leafy and luxuriant fig-tree was limp and wilted and dying. He remembered the episode of the previous morning, and said to Jesus, " Rabbi, behold the fig-tree which Thou cursedst is withered away. And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God " (vers. 21, 22). Now, that is not at all the kind of reply we should have expected Jesus to make to Peter's remark. At the first sight, it scarcely seems to the point. The kind of answer that would have seemed to us natural would have been some reference about the sure fulfilment of all His words. Instead of that, " Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God." That was, according to Jesus, the central and all-important truth to be learned from the withering of the fig-tree, a lesson of faith and its limitless power.

Prayer and its Power

Christ accomplished His mighty works through **Mark xi.** the power of God resting upon Him, and the power **22, 23.** was His because of His perfect and absolute union with the Father. Christ was never ineffective or impotent (like the disciples at the foot of the transfiguration hill), for the simple reason that He was never out of touch with God. He Himself worked **Power by Faith.** the works of Him that sent Him (John ix. 4); and His disciples, by faith might enter into enjoyment of the same power. "He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also." Nay more— "greater works than these shall he do, because I go unto the Father" (John xiv. 12). Our Lord, therefore, went on to declare, in startling terms, the power faith confers. "Whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou taken up and cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that what he saith cometh to pass; he shall have it" (ver. 23). This figure about "removing mountains" was, the commentators tell us, a favourite figure of speech for things passing ordinary capacity. And a vivid and striking figure it is. For what so solid and unmovable as the mountains "fixed in their everlasting seats"? And yet "to faith," Jesus says, the task of removing mountains is no impossibility. No task, then, is too mighty for "faith" to accomplish. No difficulty is too stupendous for "faith" to overcome. For faith links a man up to God. It reinforces man with the omnipotent energies of God. "This is the victory that hath overcome the world, even our faith" (1 John v. 4).

**Mark xi.
22, 23.**
**A Task for
Faith.**

There are some who hold that when Jesus said, “This mountain” He pointed across the valley to the hill on which the Temple stood, all flashing and gleaming with its marble and gold ; that what He meant to suggest was that these twelve disciples of His with a great faith in their hearts could remove “that mountain” ; could break down and overthrow the fabric of Judaism ; could cast the knowledge of God and the worship of God—supposed hitherto to be confined to that mountain—into the midst of the sea, *i.e.* could diffuse it amongst all nations. I am doubtful whether the saying is to be interpreted in that specialised way ; and yet the diffusion of Christianity, in spite of all efforts to crush and destroy it, is a most striking illustration of its truth. It is one example of the “removing of the mountain.” For if any enterprise ever seemed hopeless, it was the enterprise on which the Apostles at the bidding of Christ set out. There was Judaism, on the one hand—stable, as it seemed, as one of the eternal hills. And here were twelve illiterate and humble provincials on the other. Twelve men against a nation, a nation reinforced by adherents in every part of the world. To expect these twelve men to break up the fabric of Judaism seems as absurd as to expect twelve men with pick-axe and shovel to shift Mont Blanc. But, when the time came, they had a mighty faith in their hearts, and the seemingly impossible did not daunt them. Within fifty years there was no Temple on Mount Zion, and Judaism as a sacrificing system was

Prayer and its Power

no more. The mountain was cast into the midst **Mark xi.**
of the sea. **22, 23.**

This triumph of faith assuredly does not stand **Mountains Removed.** alone. After Jerusalem, the early disciples found themselves confronted by Rome, in some respects the mightiest and most colossal fabric of empire the world has ever seen. A handful of Jews on the one side, and mighty Rome on the other. But with faith in their hearts they —**In the Early Days of the Church.** addressed themselves to the task their Master had assigned them. “I am ready to preach the Gospel to you also that are in Rome” (Rom. i. 15), declares Paul. He was all eagerness to give himself to the task. “Remove!” he cried. And “Remove!” cried his followers and successors. And the mountain began to totter. Rome, that once persecuted and harried and slew the Christians, in time showed signs of yielding, until at last with Julian’s baffled and defeated cry, “Thou hast conquered, O Galilean!” you behold the mountain cast into the midst of the sea.

Many another mountain has been removed since —**In India.** those far-off days. When William Carey went out to India to preach Christianity ■ great many people felt that he might as well try to shift the Himalayas as try to replace Hinduism with Christianity. Sydney Smith (himself ■ clergyman), in the pages of the *Edinburgh Review*, made fine sport of the foolish enterprise of the “consecrated cobbler,” as he dubbed him. William Carey knew the difficulty. He was aware that to make an impression on India was like trying to remove

**Mark xi.
22, 23.** mountains. But he had faith, superb and magnificent faith, and so, weak and lonely as he was, he went out to India, and, confronting the mountain of Hinduism, began to cry, “Be thou removed.” Others followed in Carey’s wake, and took up the same cry. A little army of missionaries is to-day saying, “Be thou removed.” It is true Hinduism is not yet cast into the sea. But will anyone look at India and say the mountain has not moved? All India has been shaken out of its old allegiance. Its faith in its million gods is dying. The mountain is yielding, crumbling, falling; our successors should see it cast into the midst of the sea.

—In the
South Seas.

When John Williams went out to the South Seas, a lustful and cannibal paganism had those fair islands in its grip. John Williams went from island to island, and faced that paganism—solid and unshakeable as the mountains, so it seemed, because so inextricably intertwined with the entire social life of the people. He faced that paganism in island after island, crying before it, “Be thou removed! Be thou removed!” It seemed a hopeless and impossible enterprise; but look at the result. Islands have been cleansed, civilised, Christianised. The Christian Church has taken the place of the cannibal feast. The mountain has been cast into the midst of the sea.

The day of miracles is not over. “The works that I do shall ye do also,” said Jesus, “and greater works than these shall ye do.” The power that worked in and through Christ is willing to work in and through us. This is the one condition—*have faith in God.*

Prayer and its Power

From speaking of faith our Lord proceeds to Mark xi. speak of prayer. The transition is quite a natural 22, 23. one. It is prayer that expresses faith. It is because we believe in God that we pray to Him at all. It is in prayer we open our souls to God's indwelling. But prayer which is not the expression of faith is mere waste of breath. The only effectual prayer is believing prayer—prayer animated and informed by a living faith. "Therefore I say unto you, All things whatsoever ye pray and ask for, believe that ye have received them, and ye shall have them." (ver. 24). Believe that ye have received them! Why, we offer many prayers without expecting answers to them—just exactly as members of the Church at Jerusalem offered prayers for the release of Peter, and were frightened almost out of their wits when Rhoda came and told them Peter was actually knocking at the door. We pray for revivals, but we scarcely expect them. We pray for conversions, but we should be surprised if people really did cry, "Men, brethren, what must we do to be saved?" We do not believe that we have the things we ask for. Faith does not animate our prayers, and as a result they fail.

I wonder whether this may in part account for —And its Result. the ineffectiveness of the Church. We still have a good deal of prayer (of a sort), but it is not this expectant, believing prayer. And perhaps it is our lack of faith that accounts for our weakness. Unbelief interferes with our supply of power. You perhaps remember that incident about a Colorado village which Mr Gordon narrates in his *Quiet Talks*

**Mark xi.
22, 23.**

on Power. The rainfall is slight out there, and so some public-spirited citizen made a reservoir away up in the hills, and by means of pipes brought an abundant supply of fresh, sweet water into every house in the town. But one morning, when the housewives turned the taps, there was only a little damp sputter; no water came. The men set out to investigate. They thought something must be the matter with the reservoir. But there was nothing amiss up there; it was full of clear, cold, sparkling water. They examined the pipes as far as they could, but they could find no break. And so it went on for a day or two, until the little village was threatened with a water famine. Then one of the officials got a note which said, "If you will first pull the plug out of the pipe about eight inches from the top you'll get all the water you want." So up the men went again, and dug open the pipe, and found a plug which some mischief-maker had inserted. That plug was keeping the water away from the town. The full reservoir was of no use to the town because of that plug.

Pull out the
Plug.

May it not be so with us and the Divine power? There is no failure in God. The reservoir of grace and power is as full as ever it was. And yet somehow or other we are short of power, we lack force, we have no strength. What is the matter? There is a plug in the pipe. There is something that stops the outflow of the Divine energy of grace. And what is that something? Unbelief. We have not a living, utter trust in God. We do not believe that we have the things for which we ask. And

Prayer and its Power

before the power will come we must take out the Mark xi. plug. We must do away with unbelief. We are 22, 23. not straitened in God, we are only straitened in ourselves. It is faith, daring and triumphant faith, we want—a living and whole-hearted trust in God. According to our faith it shall be unto us. “Lord, increase our faith.”

X

THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS

“ And they come again to Jerusalem : and as He was walking in the temple, there come to Him the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders, and say unto Him, By what authority doest Thou these things ? and who gave Thee this authority to do these things ? And Jesus answered and said unto them, I will also ask of you one question, and answer Me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men ? answer Me. And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven ; He will say, Why then did ye not believe him ? But if we shall say, Of men ; they feared the people : for all men counted John, that he was a prophet indeed. And they answered and said unto Jesus, We cannot tell. And Jesus answering saith unto them, Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things.”—MARK xi. 27-33.

**Mark xi.
27-33.**

**The Lord
and the
Temple.**

THE actions of Christ during Passion Week had greatly exercised and disturbed the religious authorities ; more especially His action in sweeping out of the Temple those who bought and sold within it. They had looked on, almost speechless with anger, while Christ on the Sunday rode in lowly triumph into Jerusalem, attended by applauding crowds. The triumphal entry, however, did not seem to them the best occasion for attacking Jesus, for the events of that day might, with a show of reason, have been set down to the uncontrollable enthusiasm of the people. But for the cleansing of the Temple

The Authority of Jesus

the entire responsibility lay at Christ's door. He **Mark xi.** Himself took the initiative. From first to last, the 27-33. action was His own. And no action our Lord took was more significant. He acted as if He were the Lord of the Temple ; as if the Holy Place were His ; and as if the right to lay down regulations for its use belonged, not to the priests, its official custodians, but to Himself. To the Jerusalem leaders this assertion of authority must have been peculiarly galling. For it involved the repudiation of their own. It was, in effect, ■ public declaration that what authority they possessed they had flagrantly and wickedly abused, and here was the Lord of the Temple come to take away from them an authority with which they could not be trusted. High priests and rulers seem to have been too surprised and stupefied to make any protest at the moment. The moral majesty of Christ overawed them, their own consciences made cowards of them. But our Lord's action rankled in their minds. They smarted under a sense of exposure and condemnation. And when our Lord withdrew Himself for the night to Bethany, they met, I imagine, in secret conclave to discuss what they were to do with Him. For quite clearly to allow His action in cleansing the Temple to pass unchallenged was equivalent to abdicating their own position.

Here we get the result of their deliberations. The
You will notice they do not challenge the rightness Question of
of the action itself. They knew quite well that for its Custo-
their conduct in allowing the Temple courts to be dians.
used for purposes of greed and unholy gain they

St Mark x. 32—xiii. 37

Mark xi. were absolutely without defence. On that point they allow judgment to go against them by default. What they challenge is not the rightness of the action, but Christ's right to take it. So when our Lord appeared in Jerusalem on the Tuesday morning, as He was walking in the Temple, there came to Him the chief priests and the scribes and the elders ; and they said unto Him. “ By what authority doest Thou these things ? or who gave Thee this authority to do these things ? ” (ver. 28).

A Factious Question.

We may take it for granted that the chief priests and scribes did not ask this question because they were in difficulty, and really wanted to know. If that had been their motive, you may depend upon it Christ would have given them a plain and gracious answer. Christ was not the person to tantalise a man honestly perplexed, and to send him away mystified and confounded. The way in which Christ treated these men makes me quite sure that they asked this question out of spite, and rage, and hate, and not because they wanted to know. What they wanted was, to revenge themselves, if they could, for their humiliation of the day before. They asked the question, tempting Him. They hoped it might put Him in a difficulty. Perhaps, as Dr David Smith says, they hoped to elicit from Him, not merely an assertion of His Messiahship, but some declaration of His oneness with God, like that which on a previous occasion had made the Jews take up stones to stone Him. That was their hope—that Jesus would say something which would inflame the mob, and so enable them to wreak upon

The Authority of Jesus

Him that vengeance which was denied them so long **Mark xi.**
as the multitude was on His side.

27-33.

And yet while behind the question there lay a —But a
hate which was as cruel as the grave, the question Plausible
itself was eminently plausible. It was the kind of
question which the man in the street would feel the
chief priests and elders had a perfect right to put.
For these people were the religious rulers of Judaism.
It would therefore appear a perfectly natural thing
for them to ask Jesus what His authority was for
teaching and preaching. For He held no office,
and by men He had never been appointed to His
work. It would therefore appear a very natural
and reasonable thing for the regularly constituted
and recognised authorities to come to Jesus with
the question, “By what authority doest Thou these
things ? or who gave Thee this authority ? ”

First of all, notice that even Christ's bitterest foes Recognition
make confession of His authority. They could not of Christ's
help it. Authority was one of the most striking
characteristics of our Lord's manner. That was
what struck everybody who either heard or saw
Him. Turn to the Sermon on the Mount for one
illustration. The dominant impression left upon
the minds of the hearers was that of the authorita-
tiveness of the Preacher. There was the note of
certitude in all He said. And, more than the note
of certitude, there was that regal tone which di-
tinguishes one who knows Himself to be the final
court of appeal. This comes out most noticeably
in the attitude He takes up toward Moses. You
remember how, in the course of that sermon, He

St Mark x. 32—xiii. 37

Mark xi. passes in review certain precepts and counsels of the Mosaic law. These He undertakes to revise and alter and abrogate on His own *ipse dixit*. “Ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time,” He begins, and then enunciates the Mosaic rule. “But I say unto you,” He proceeds, and undertakes on His own authority to set up a new law and standard. He places Himself above Moses. He constitutes Himself the final court of appeal. When He has spoken, the last word has been said. It is not surprising that the people, trained up to regard every letter of the Mosaic law as sacred, were surprised. “The multitude were astonished at His teaching; for He taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes” (Matt. vii. 28, 29).

Authority in Action. The authority which was so marked in His speech was equally noticeable in His actions. He claimed, for instance, the authority to forgive sins; and if an outward miracle is any proof of an inward grace, He not only claimed it but exercised it. He claimed and exercised authority over unclean spirits, so that when He commanded them to come out, they immediately obeyed Him. He claimed and exercised authority over disease and death. And on the preceding day He had claimed and exercised authority over the Temple. The authority was not only claimed, it was exercised, it was acknowledged, it was obeyed. It was no use trying to deny the reality of that authority before which the traders had fled, panic-stricken and demoralised, the day before. These chief priests and elders do not

The Authority of Jesus

attempt to deny it. They only profess a wish to **Mark xi.** know what kind of an authority it was, and whence **27-33.** Christ derived it.

But what an amazing admission even this confession is ! God is continually making the wrath of men to praise Him. From the lips of Christ's critics and foes some of the most wonderful testimonies to His greatness have issued. The officers who were sent to seize Him had to admit that never man spake like He spake. The Herodians who came to tempt Him had to confess that He did not regard the person of men, but taught the way of God in truth. These chief priests and elders are constrained to bear unwilling witness to His unique authority. "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings Thou hast perfected praise" (Matt. xxi. 16), said Jesus, as He listened to the shouts of the children who acclaimed Him, as He rode in triumph into Jerusalem. That praise should come out of the mouths of babes and sucklings is wonderful enough. But here is something more wonderful still. "Out of the mouths of enemies and foes hast Thou perfected praise." Enemies and foes are constrained to bear witness to Him. Chief priests and elders bear testimony to His unique and unparalleled authority. This is the kind of witness that stills the enemy and the avenger, and puts to silence the ignorance of foolish men.

The suggestion that lay behind the question of **The Counter-Inquiry.** the chief priests and scribes was that Christ, being neither priest nor scribe, was an unauthorised and irregular teacher, and had therefore no right to

St Mark x. 32—xiii. 37

Mark xi. teach. Our Lord meets their question with the suggestion that lay behind it, by asking them another question. “The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or from men ?” (ver. 30). Now, first of all, I want to make it quite clear that this was not an attempt to snatch a dialectical victory.

This was not an attempt to escape from a difficult question by posing His questioners with another. It was, no doubt, as Dr David Smith says, “a masterpiece of dialectic.” But it was also, as he adds, very much more. At first you might be tempted to ask, “What has the question of the origin of John’s baptism to do with the question of Christ’s authority ?” Christ’s counter-question at first sight seems to be hopelessly irrelevant. It does not appear to have the remotest bearing upon the question originally asked. As a matter of fact, however, it went down to the very roots of things. It had the most close and vital bearing upon the question of Christ’s own authority. The answer to Christ’s question about John’s baptism would supply them with the answer to their own question about Christ’s authority.

**John an
Unofficial
Preacher.**

For, to begin with, John, like Jesus, was an unauthorised preacher. That is to say, though the son of a priest, John was himself never in the priest’s office. He owed absolutely nothing to Jerusalem. Priests and elders had never authorised him to preach. He had had no sort of “orders” conferred upon him. John belonged not to the priests, but the prophets. The priest is created by human appointment ; the prophet is made by the

The Authority of Jesus

direct inspiration of God. Priesthood was a matter *Mark xi.* of family and succession and "order"; prophecy *27-33.* was the gift of the Spirit. John preached and taught, not because of any authority conferred upon him by man, but because, like Amos, like Jeremiah, like Elijah, like Isaiah, the word was as a fire in his bones, and he knew himself called of God. Now all Judæa believed that John was a prophet. The people felt that through him God spoke to their souls. Even priests and scribes and elders had been moved and impressed by John. They had felt the Divine power working through him. "Ye were willing to rejoice for a season in his light" (*John v. 35*), Jesus had said of them, on an earlier occasion. They knew that John was a teacher sent from God; they knew that his baptism was from heaven. But then to admit that about John, was to give away their case against Jesus; for John, like Jesus, was an unauthorised teacher; and to admit that John was sent of God, was to admit also in the case of Jesus that, though Jerusalem was ignorant of Him, and the priests acknowledged Him not, His authority too might be derived from heaven.

In the second place, John himself had witnessed *John's Witness to Christ.* to Christ's Messiahship. He had borne repeated and emphatic witness to it. It was he who said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world!" It was he who said, "This is He of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is become before me. . . . And I have seen, and have borne witness that this is the Son of God" (*John i. 29, 34*). If they admitted that John's

Mark xi.
27-33.

baptism was from heaven—as they knew it was, though through their pride and hardness of heart they had rejected John's call, and refused to submit themselves to the baptism of repentance—then Christ would naturally retort upon them, “ Why, then, did ye not believe him, and especially in regard to John's witness to Myself ? ” Believing John, they ought to have passed as naturally into the ranks of Christ's disciples, as did Andrew and John.

The
Dilemma.

This, then, was the question Jesus propounded to the so-called leaders of religion in Palestine, “ The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or from men ? ” It put our Lord's questioners on the horns of a dilemma. If they should give the true answer, and say, “ From heaven,” it was giving their whole case against Christ away ; it was more, it was laying themselves open to the charge of perverse and obstinate unbelief. On the other hand, if they took refuge in the obviously false answer, “ From men,” they feared the people. It was a risky thing to deny John's divine commission, “ for all verily held John to be a prophet ” (ver. 32). For a minute or two they hesitated, embarrassed, and not knowing what to say. “ Answer Me,” insisted Jesus. And then they blurted out the helpless and feeble confession, “ We know not.” They confessed themselves, that is to say, incapable of telling whether John was a charlatan or not ; they confessed themselves incapable of distinguishing between a genuine and a sham religious movement. They confessed that in these high spiritual matters they could not judge. And by that miserable confession

The Authority of Jesus

they put themselves clean out of court. They had **Mark xi.** come to Jesus proposing to adjudicate about His **27-33.** claims. But who were they, to be able to decide upon the claims of Jesus, when they confessed themselves incapable of deciding upon the work of John ? These things are spiritually discerned, and they had pronounced themselves spiritual incapables, blind leaders of the blind. "Neither tell I you," was our Lord's rejoinder, "by what authority I do these things" (ver. 33).

Now let us turn our attention to the subject of **The Nature and Source of Christ's Authority.** Christ's authority, and consider the nature and the origin of it. "By what authority doest Thou these things ? Or who gave Thee this authority to do these things ?" There is a twofold inquiry in this question. There is an inquiry as to the kind of the authority, and as to its source.

First, then—as to the kind of authority—it was —**It was Moral and Spiritual.** moral and spiritual, not official. Christ filled no office. He was neither priest nor Levite, nor elder nor scribe. And yet He spoke with an authority they could never hope to equal. The scribes had all the advantages of official status, but they wielded no power. Jesus came, a peasant from Nazareth, without any badge of office, and He exercised resistless power. It was moral authority. It was spiritual power. It was the authority of a holy character. Christ not only preached the truth, He was it. He was incarnate holiness. And men instinctively bowed to the authority of a perfectly pure and holy life. It was the authority of knowledge. Men instinctively recognise whether a man

St Mark x. 32—xiii. 37

Mark xi. is or is not speaking of things he knows ; whether it is an authentic word or a second-hand message they are listening to. The scribes dealt in traditions. All their speech was second-hand. Jesus spoke with the sure accents of one in direct touch with eternal realities. He spoke that which He knew, and testified that which He had seen. And the result was, He was invested with an authority which all men recognised, and before which all men of honest and good heart instinctively bowed.

**Its Source
was the
Father.**

In the second place—as to the source of the authority—Jesus derived His right to speak and act as He did from God. It was His Father Who had commissioned Him. It was the Father's works He did. It was from His Father He had received His commandments. Priests and elders thought that they were the source of preaching and teaching authority. They claimed that no one had the right to teach or speak unless he had received his “orders” from them. Jesus had asked for no authorisation from them. He had never been humanly “ordained” to this work. From the priestly point of view, He was not in “orders.” He was a mere layman. But Christ had no need of commission from priests and elders. He derived His authority from a higher source. He was commissioned by the Most High. His right to preach and teach was, that the Father had sent Him.

**Moral
Authority
dependent
on
Character.**

Two permanent lessons this story has to teach—lessons of vital importance to us still. This is the first. There is no moral authority without character. “As the man is, so is his strength.” Office

The Authority of Jesus

in itself will never confer moral authority. The *Mark xi.* sons of Eli had office. But they had not character. **27-33.** What was their influence? Nothing; worse than nothing. Because of them men abhorred the offering of the Lord. If we want to wield power for God, we must first of all be ourselves men of God. To do good we must be good. Without character, though we have all official guarantees, we are no better than sounding-brass or a tinkling cymbal.

The second lesson is this—the ultimate source of God the authority to teach and preach is God. No man is ordained unless he is ordained of God. Nobody is really “in orders” unless he is placed in them by God. All that men can do is to ratify God’s ordaining. No man, called of God, needs human authority to speak for Him. I have no word to say by way of disparagement of human ordination; I have been ordained myself. I have myself been set aside by the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. I believe that ordination tends to orderliness in the Church. And yet I would never forget that the real authority to preach comes from a higher source—it comes from God. And He can and does give it to men on whom no human hands have ever been laid. The Spirit bloweth still where He listeth, and the man dowered with the Spirit is the man ordained of God.

Authority
for the
Ministerial
Office.

XI

THE WICKED HUSBANDMEN

" And He began to speak unto them by parables. A certain man planted a vineyard, and set an hedge about it, and digged a place for the winefat, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country. And at the season he sent to the husbandmen a servant, that he might receive from the husbandmen of the fruit of the vineyard. And they caught him, and beat him, and sent him away empty. And again he sent unto them another servant ; and at him they cast stones, and wounded him in the head, and sent him away shamefully handled. And again he sent another ; and him they killed, and many others ; beating some, and killing some. Having yet therefore one son, his well-beloved, he sent him also last unto them, saying, They will reverence my son. But those husbandmen said among themselves, This is the heir ; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours. And they took him, and killed him, and cast him out of the vineyard. What shall therefore the lord of the vineyard do ? he will come and destroy the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard unto others. And have ye not read this scripture : The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner ; This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes ? And they sought to lay hold on Him, but feared the people : for they knew that He had spoken the parable against them : and they left Him, and went their way."—MARK xii. 1-12.

Mark xii. 1-12. THIS parable, the parable of the wicked husbandmen, as we call it, is, on the whole, perhaps the saddest and sternest that ever fell from the lips of Christ. Dr. A. B. Bruce classifies it as a parable of judgment. And such undoubtedly it

The Wicked Husbandmen

is. And the judgment appears the more severe **Mark xii.** and stern because judgment is Christ's strange **I-12.** work ; and the doom pronounced appears the more awful, because it falls from the lips of Him Who said of Himself that He had not come into the world to judge the world, but that the world through Him should be saved. Before I begin to discuss this poignant and heartbreaking parable, let me try to place it for you in its right context. After their humiliating experience **The Two Sons.** in the discussion about authority, the priests and the elders would very gladly have withdrawn quietly away. But Jesus did not permit them to do that. He carried the war into the enemy's camp. They had come to challenge Christ's authority. He was not content to expose their spiritual incompetence. By means of the parable of the Two Sons, He roundly charged them with the sin of insincerity. They were like the elder son in that parable, who, when his father bade him go and work in the vineyard, replied, "I go, sir," and went not. Theirs was all profession, without practice. They made a great parade of their reverence for God, and did not obey Him. And so it would come to pass, Jesus said, that the publicans and harlots would go into the Kingdom of God before them. For while by their wild and reckless life the publicans and harlots had seemed to refuse obedience to God, like the younger son, who, when his father bade him go and work, said, "I go not"; yet at the call of John these people had repented of their

Mark xii. 1-12. sin, and returned to God, like the younger son, who afterwards repented and went. This parable Jesus seems to have spoken directly to the priests and elders, and it bit deep; for they themselves must have known how true it was that while they worshipped God with their lips, their hearts were far from Him.

The Wicked Husbandmen.

But even after uttering the parable of the Two Sons, Christ had not done with these unhappy priests and scribes. Turning away from them, He addressed Himself to the crowd that was standing round, and spoke to them this parable of the Wicked Husbandmen. After having spoken *to* them, He proceeded to speak *about* them to the crowd. In the parable of the Two Sons He had charged the priests and elders directly with the sin of insincerity. In this parable He speaks to the multitude of the doom that is sure to fall upon these men who professed religion, and did not practise it; upon these religious leaders who were not religious themselves; upon these so-called religious guides who had rejected and persecuted and slain every servant God had sent to them. Their high place was to be forfeited; all their privileges were to be taken away. They were to fall under the holy wrath of God. "He will come and destroy the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard unto others" (ver. 9). And the priests and elders recognised the point of the story. They needed no laboured explanations. It carried its terrible meaning on its face. It

The Wicked Husbandmen

was of *their* faithlessness, and *their* wickedness, Mark xii. and *their* rejection and doom Christ had spoken. 1-12. And if the parable of the Two Sons bit deep, this pierced them to the very heart. In their rage and hate, they would have murdered Christ on the spot, had they dared. "And they sought to lay hold on Him; and they feared the multitude; for they perceived that He spake the parable against them" (ver. 12).

Now let me turn to the parable itself. It is, The Judgment of Faithlessness primarily, as I have already said, a parable of judgment; and it is from that point of view ness.

I want in the first place to look at it. The broad drift of the meaning of the parable is sufficiently evident. It was still more evident to those who first listened to it. For in a sense this was not a new parable to the Jews; it was an old and familiar parable. Long before, Isaiah (Isa. v.) had pictured Israel as a vineyard, and had sung a song of what God had done for it—how He made a trench about it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also hewed out a winepress therein. But Israel disappointed God, for when He looked that it should bring forth grapes, behold, it brought forth wild grapes. That allegory of Isaiah was familiar enough to every Jewish mind; and what Jesus does here, is to take that old and familiar allegory, and adapt it to His own special purpose. As soon as the first sentence about the man planting a

Mark xii. 1-12. vineyard fell from His lips, His listeners knew it was of Israel, *i.e.* of themselves, Christ was speaking.

**The Story
and its
Application.**

Now in interpreting the parables we must not try to find a specific spiritual equivalent for every little detail in the picture. If we begin to puzzle over what the hedge means, and what the wine-press means, and indeed, what exactly the vineyard means, we shall become hopelessly mystified and confused. The analogy between the earthly story and the spiritual truth it is meant to teach, is an analogy in broad outline, and does not extend to minute particulars. Let me in such broad outline set forth the truth this tragic story is meant to teach. The owner of the vineyard in this case is God. The husbandmen to whom He let it out are the Jews, and especially the Jewish leaders—the elders and chief priests and scribes about whom we read in the preceding paragraph. The vineyard itself is not quite so easy satisfactorily to interpret. Some say that it stands for the Church; others that it stands for the Kingdom of God. Let us be content to think that the “vineyard” stands for those unique religious privileges and opportunities God bestowed upon Israel. God did for Israel what He did not for any other nation. He made them the recipients of a unique revelation. He made them the depositaries of the true faith. And He did everything that could be done to secure that Israel should keep the deposit, and preserve and diffuse the revelation. But Israel was false to its trust. Again and again the people turned apostate.

The Wicked Husbandmen

Instead of keeping and spreading the true faith, *Mark xii.* Israel again and again forsook the Lord, and *1-12.* turned after strange gods. Israel was indeed a vineyard from which God did not receive the expected fruit.

Again and again He sent His servants to this *The Servants* perverse and rebellious people. Prophet after *and the* prophet summoned them back to the service of men. *Husband-* God. But there was scarcely a prophet whom they did not repudiate and persecute. The description in this parable is literally true. Some they beat, and some they wounded in the head, and handled shamefully, and so with many others, beating some, and killing some. Elijah, Micaiah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, John the Baptist—they had all suffered. They pleaded and reasoned with Israel in vain. Rejection had been their invariable lot. And the climax of Israel's rebellion and persistent faithlessness came in their treatment of Jesus. When His servants all failed, God sent His only *The Mission* Son. "They will reverence my Son," He said. *of the Son.* But when these wicked husbandmen saw the Son they said, "This is the heir; come, let us kill Him" (v. 7). That is to say, Jesus prophesies that as they had treated the prophets, so they would treat the Son. And it all came true. Before the week was out the Jews, incited by their leaders, had nailed the Son Himself to the bitter tree!

That was the history of Israel—a history of Neglected Opportunities opportunities neglected, privileges abused, a great and Divine trust betrayed. God got no fruit from this vine-Sentence.

Mark xii. 1-12. yard He had so carefully planted and so jealously guarded. All the labours of prophets and Psalmists had been in vain. Far from spreading the faith, Israel had not even kept it. Far from extending the Kingdom, Israel itself had been rebellious. "What therefore will the lord of the vineyard do?" asked Jesus (v. 9). And the people gave back the answer, "Miserable men! He will come and destroy these husbandmen, and will give the vineyard unto others" (Luke xx. 15, 16). And although, according to Luke's account, the priests and rulers broke in with a passionate "God forbid!" Jesus accepts the people's verdict. That is exactly the fate that shall overtake faithless Israel. The vineyard shall be taken away from them. They shall lose their high place. They shall cease to be God's chosen instruments. He will entrust the cause of the Kingdom to other hands.

The Sentence Executed. It all came true. Faithless Israel was destroyed. Forty years after this parable was spoken the nation was shattered, crushed, and broken. Israel religiously ceased to count. God put the care of His Kingdom into other hands. Like His Apostles, He turned to the Gentiles. He let out the vineyard to others, who were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise. And from them has God's fruit been found.

Privileges and Responsibility.

That is the story, a story of tragic import to the Jews who heard it, and full of the most solemn warning to us as well. I can scarcely do more

The Wicked Husbandmen

than point out some of its most obvious lessons. Mark xii. Notice, first of all, how the parable insists upon it 1-12. that privilege carries with it responsibility. If God lets out a vineyard, He expects fruit. That is to say, gifts and privileges are all for service and use. God expects a return for them. As Dr Glover says, "We have a rent to pay for every privilege." It does not matter what the privilege may be. One man's gift may be wealth, and another's may be learning, and another's may be leisure. It matters not; God expects wealth, learning and leisure to be used for His glory, for the good of men. And especially is this the case in respect of religious privileges. They are given for use. God expects rent for them. And the rent he expects is their employment for the benefit of others. "Necessity is laid upon me, and woe is me if I preach not the Gospel," that is the rent. We have been signally favoured in regard to religious privileges. Is God getting the rent He expects? Are we diffusing the light? Are we spreading the kingdom? Is God's cause profiting by us? Does the Lord get His fruit?

Then notice, secondly, what an illustration we get here of the progression of sin. These husbandmen begin by beating a servant, they end by killing the Son. They began by being merely perverse and wilful, they ended by being wicked and devilish. That is one of the terrible characteristics of sin. Evil grows. "Is thy servant a dog" (2 Kings viii. 13), said Hazael,

The
Progression
of Sin.

Mark xii. when the prophet foretold some awful enormity
I-12. that would be perpetrated by him. He was
indignant at the bare suggestion. And yet he
did all the atrocious things predicted. Sin dulls
the sensibilities, and sears the conscience, and so
gradually the sinner becomes capable of crimes
from which in his more innocent days he would
have shrunk in horror. Thus it came about that
Jerusalem, which began by rejecting the messages
of the prophets, ended by crucifying Christ between
two thieves.

The End of
Faithlessness
—Depriva-
tion.

But, of course, the central lesson of all is this,
that faithlessness is punished by deprivation. It
is so all through life. Any possession, any power,
any gift that is not put to use, is taken away.
Atrophy is one of Nature's tragic truths. The
condition of the retention of any faculty is its
employment. And it is so specially with religious
place and privilege. If we lose our first love,
and cease to do our first works, the result will be
that our candlestick will be removed out of its
place. Many candlesticks have been removed.
Many transferences of privilege have taken place.
The Jew was rejected, and the Gentile put in his
place. Early in the story of Christianity, the
Eastern Church lost its pride of place, and the
Western Church led in its stead. In the six-
teenth century the Roman Church failed to shake
itself free of its superstitious falsities, and so the
leadership fell to the Churches of the Reformation.
God has raised us, as a people, high
amongst the nations. He has conferred upon

The Wicked Husbandmen

us signal honour and privilege. But let us **Mark xii.** remember that a Britain that ceases to be faithful **I-12.** may be thrust from her high place, and her glory may be given to another. We hold our place only on condition that we bring forth fruit. A faithless Britain may be ■ cast-away Britain. God may give the vineyard to others. We may become as Nineveh and Tyre. There is need to pray, "Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet, lest we forget, lest we forget!"

But this parable is not simply a parable of **The Divine judgment upon human faithlessness.** It is also **Patience.** a parable of the Divine patience, and of the unique and unshared glory of Christ. It is ■ parable of the Divine patience. Dr A. B. Bruce says that no landlord would ever have acted as this landlord did. The whole story has an air of improbability, not to say impossibility. An ordinary landlord would very speedily have evicted these troublesome and rebellious tenants. Quite so. Jesus had to tell an improbable, almost an impossible, story if He was to convey any notion of the patience and long-suffering of God. For God's patience does pass all the limits possible to us men. As Faber puts it, "His fondness goes far out beyond our dreams." Indeed, in its primary application, this parable is not a parable at all, it is simple, matter-of-fact history. This is how God treated Israel. He sent to them servant after servant, prophet after prophet. And though Israel turned a deaf ear to the appeals of God's prophets, from Amos to John the Baptist,

Mark xii. even then God's patience was not exhausted.
I-12. He had yet one, a beloved Son; He sent Him last unto them, saying, "They will reverence My Son!" What marvellous and subduing patience this is!

—A Patience that Still Lasts. And all this is true of the patience of God still. That is the chief characteristic of the love of God—it lasts! It outlasts. "How often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?" asked Peter one day; "until seven times?" And I have no doubt that in suggesting seven times he thought he was making a most generous offer. "I say not unto thee, Until seven times," said Jesus, "but, Until seventy times seven" (Matt. xviii. 21, 22). Seventy times seven, that is the way in which the Divine love forgives. That is the way in which the Divine love pleads and entreats. It does not depart at the first rebuff. It returns until seventy times seven. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock," says the Lord. Or, as the Greek verb might be translated, "I have been standing ■ long time, and am standing still" (Rev. iii. 20). It is not once He knocks. He continues to stand, and continues to knock, until seventy times seven. If there had been no second chance, if the Lord had left us at the first rebuff, it would have gone hard with some of us. But the long-suffering of the Lord, as Peter says, is salvation. We may have rejected His offers again and again and again, but our rejection will not be cast up against us.

The Wicked Husbandmen

"If I ask Him to receive me,
Will He say me nay?
Not till earth, and not till heaven,
Pass away."

Mark xii.
I-12.

Again, this is a parable not only of the judgment of faithlessness and the Divine patience, but also a parable of the unshared glory of Christ. Here He tells the people what was the ground of His authority to cleanse the Temple, to forgive sins, to abrogate the law of Moses. It comes out in verse 6. "He had yet one, a beloved Son; He sent Him last unto them, saying, They will reverence My Son." Now in that verse Christ is speaking of Himself. He is the Son whom the Lord of the vineyard sent as His last hope. "The verse is of immense significance," Dr Bruce says, "for the self-consciousness of Jesus." And its significance consists in this. Jesus is here drawing a distinction between Himself and the prophets, between Himself and Isaiah and Jeremiah and Elijah and Moses. What were they? Servants. What was He? A Son. He places Himself in a category quite apart from the greatest and noblest of men. Even Moses was but a slave in God's house. Jesus was a Son over it. That was Christ's answer to the question, "By what authority doest Thou these things? or who gave Thee this authority to do these things?" His right to do these things was that He was God's only and beloved Son. His authority roots itself in His personality.

Mark xii. That is where Christ's authority roots itself still. Christ is the Master-light of all our seeing. **I-12.** He is the Lord of our consciences. His veriest word is law. That is too vast and august an authority to entrust to the best and noblest of men. The only justification for it is that Christ is more than man, that He is God's beloved Son, that He is God Himself incarnate in the flesh, and by word and deed declaring His holy will concerning us. That is just what He was. A greater than the greatest of the prophets—God's beloved Son. To God's Son we cannot render homage too complete, or obedience too explicit. He has a right to His unquestioned authority. It was God Himself Who, speaking of Jesus, said to the three disciples on the holy mount, and through them to all men and women for all time, "This is My beloved Son ; hear Him." Do we hear Him ? And obey Him ? Do we recognise and bow to His authority ? "Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him."

XII

THE TRIBUTE MONEY

"And they send unto Him certain of the Pharisees and of the Herodians, to catch Him in His words. And when they were come, they say unto Him, Master, we know that Thou art true, and carest for no man: for Thou regardest not the person of men, but teachest the way of God in truth: Is it lawful to give tribute to Cæsar, or not? Shall we give, or shall we not give? But He, knowing their hypocrisy, said unto them, Why tempt ye Me? bring Me a penny, that I may see it. And they brought it. And He saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? And they said unto Him, Cæsar's. And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's. And they marvelled at Him."—MARK xii. 13-17.

"AND they," i.e. the chief priests and elders, *Mark xii. 13-17.* send unto Him certain of the Pharisees and of the Herodians" (v. 15). The young men who actually submitted the question about tribute to Jesus were not the originators and instigators of this plot. They were only the instruments and tools. Behind the actual questioners, in the back-ground I see the sinister figures of Caiaphas and Annas, the high priests. Their own humiliating defeat in their debate with Christ about authority had only intensified their malice and rage, and hardened their resolve to catch Christ, if possible, in His talk. So this chapter tells The Enquirers.

Mark xii. us of a series of difficult questions which were submitted to Christ, and the plotters who concocted them all were the chief priests and the elders. To ask this question about tribute they choose certain young disciples of the Pharisees, and along with them certain young men of the Herodian party. Their choice of young men was cunningly made. Their very youth, they argued, would give to the deputation an air of guilelessness and sincerity, and so would help to throw Jesus off His guard, and induce Him to speak with dangerous freedom. And the combination too of Pharisees and Herodians was a clever move. For as a rule Pharisees and Herodians were at daggers drawn. They stood for different ideals. The Pharisees were the patriotic party, who held that the Jews were God's chosen people, meant not simply for independence, but for supremacy; who accordingly felt the Roman yoke to be a constant and almost unbearable irritation. The Herodians, on the other hand, were the courtly party, attached primarily to the Herodian dynasty, but through them to the Roman empire, to whose favour the Herods owed their thrones. The Pharisees were the irreconcilable opponents of Rome. The Herodians, as Dr Salmond says, accepted Roman rule, and profited by it. They sent these young Pharisees and these Herodians to Jesus. They thought it would look as if these eager young rabbis had been debating the question with the Herodians, and that in their failure to agree they had

—Why chosen.

The Tribute Money

decided to submit the matter to Christ, and to Mark xii. appeal to Him as arbitrator.

13-17.

That is exactly the attitude the deputation <sup>The Manner
of their
Enquiry.</sup> assume in their approach. There is all the difference in the world between the manner of this deputation and the manner of the chief priests and elders when they came to Christ with their question about authorities. The chief priests and elders talked down to Christ; they put Him in the dock, so to speak; ordered Him to defend Himself, and undertook themselves to adjudicate on His claims. These young Pharisees and Herodians talk up to Christ, they treat Him as the Master, and salute Him as the Authority Whose word on the subject of debate will settle the quarrel.

"Master," they say, "we know that Thou art true, and carest not for anyone; for Thou regardest not the person of men, but of a truth teachest the way of God. Is it lawful to give tribute unto Cæsar, or not? Shall we give, or shall we not give?" (vv. 14, 15). First of all, let us notice what an unholy alliance there is here. As I have already said, as ■ rule Pharisees and Herodians were at daggers drawn. They stood for different national ideals. They were as far apart, shall I say? as the Clerical and the Free-thinker in France. But they hated Jesus more than they hated each other. And in their deeper hate of Him they forgot for the moment their mutual animosities, and became allies and friends. All the varied interests

Mark xii. 13-17. of hypocrisy and sin combine and unite to persecute Jesus. That is a suggestive little sentence in the Gospels—"And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day" (Luke xxii. 12). What day was that? The day when between them they allowed Jesus to be done to death. And many a Pilate and a Herod, at enmity amongst themselves, become friends when it is a case of opposing and persecuting Jesus. Mr Malice, and Mr No Good, and Mr Love Lust and Mr Heady, these brave citizens of Vanity Fair, had no doubt their own private quarrels; but they acted as one man when it came to dealing with Christian and Faithful, who had dared to despise and denounce their fair. A common hate unites all evil principalities and powers against the Lord.

—And their Defeat.

Yet these evil alliances are all in vain. As easily as our Lord overthrew these Pharisees and Herodians, with their cunningly concocted question, so easily does He overthrow and break down all evil combinations against Him, to this day. "The Kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against His Anointed. . . . He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision" (Psalm ii. 2, 4). All unholy alliances against Christ, however formidable they may appear, are doomed to defeat. "He that falleth upon this stone shall be broken to pieces; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will scatter him as dust" (Matt. xxii. 44).

The Tribute Money

But what a magnificent testimony these **Mark xii.** Pharisees and Herodians bear to Jesus ! Look at **13-17.** it, "Master," they say, "we know that Thou art —^{Their} ^{Testimony} true"—true, that is, as Dr Morison says, to Jesus. ingenuous, honest, transparent; or, as the *Twentieth Century New Testament* translates it, "we know that Thou art an honest man"; "and carest not for anyone," that is, absolutely frank and fearless; Jesus was one who would not trim or whittle away the truth out of fear of the great and mighty; "for Thou regardest not the person of man," or, as the Greek might literally be translated, "Thou lookest not into the face of man"; in which phrase, says Dr Morison again, there is a hint of the law-courts. Justice is always represented as blindfold. Who the parties to a suit are, makes no difference to Justice. She never looks upon the faces of the suitors at her bar. But the venal judges of the East were often in the habit of looking into the faces of their suitors; partiality often took the place of justice, and the stronger suitor was favoured at the expense of the weaker. But Jesus never, in this sense, looked into any man's face, He was inexorably and perfectly just, completely and entirely impartial. "Thou payest no regard to a man's position, but teachest the Way of God in truth." It was the "way of God," and not any mere human philosophy that Jesus taught. His word carried upon it the impress of its own Divineness.

Mark xii.
13-17.

—Not
Flattery
but Truth.

Now look at all that these Pharisees and Herodians attribute to Christ: honesty, fearlessness, perfect impartiality, a unique knowledge of the way of God. Of course it may be held that all this was said by way of flattery. Granted readily. But even flattery, if it is not to defeat itself, must proceed on a basis of truth. Flattery consists in the exaggeration of good qualities already existing. If a man attributes to another qualities he does not possess, the man is not flattered, he is insulted. He feels that the other is making a fool of him. Granted, then, that these men were intent on flattering Jesus, and that their reverence was feigned, it nevertheless remains true that they were only able to attribute these various qualities to Jesus because He verily possessed them. The eulogium was well founded, though the motive that prompted them to make it was as false as could be. This then is the involuntary tribute His bitter foes were constrained to pay to Christ. God makes the very wrath of men to praise Him, the Old Book says (Psalm lxxvi. 10), and from the lips of His adversaries and foes some of the noblest testimonies to Christ have come.

The Many
Hostile
Witnesses.

It seems to me that if I had nothing but the witness of Christ's enemies to go upon, I should be constrained to believe He was more than man. "Never man spake like this man" (John vii. 46), said the officers who had been sent to seize Him. "I find no fault in Him" (John xix. 6), said Pilate. "He saved others,

The Tribute Money

Himself He cannot save" (Matt. xxvii. 42), said Mark xii. mocking priests at the foot of the cross. 13-17. "Certainly this was the Son of God" (Luke xxiii. 47), said the centurion who had charge of the execution. Unwilling testimony to His unique and unshared greatness is wrung from the lips of men who would gladly have discovered some fleck or flaw in Him. And it is so still, the very men who criticise Christ are constrained to glorify Him. Sceptical men like John Stuart Mill can think of no better rule for life than so to live that Christ would approve the life. Strauss says, "It will never be possible to rise above Him, or to imagine anyone who should even be equal to Him." Renan declares that between Him and God there is no distinction. Now who was this man, about whom His very critics and foes bear testimony that He was unlike every other man the world has ever seen ; that He was greater, wiser, holier than any man the world has ever seen ? People talk sometimes about the difficulty of believing that Jesus was the Son of God. My difficulty is in believing anything else. "I say, the acknowledgment of God in Christ," wrote Browning, "accepted by the reason, solves for thee all questions in the earth, and out of it."

Now let me continue the story. It was not because of any genuine difficulty about the matter that these Pharisees and Herodians brought this question about tribute-money to Jesus. Their question was designed as a trick, a plot, a snare.

The Attempted Dilemma.

Mark xii. They thought that it would put the Lord on the horns of a dilemma, and that, whichever way He replied, He was bound to deliver Himself into their hands. For if He answered in the Herodian sense, and said, "Yes, it is lawful to pay tribute," the Pharisees would have at once denounced Him as a traitor to His race, and His popularity would have been destroyed on the instant. On the other hand, if He had taken the side of the Pharisees, and said, "No, it is not lawful to pay tribute," the Herodians would have at once denounced Him to Pilate as being guilty of the crime of high treason. Whichever way the Lord answered the question, He seemed bound to come into collision either with the people or with Pilate.

**The
Dilemma
Met.**

But it is an ill business trying to lay plots for the Lord. He was not deceived by the plausibility of their question, nor by the flattery of their address. He saw into the wicked and murderous intent behind it all. He read the hearts of these men like an open book. "Why tempt ye me!" He said. And then He cried, "Bring me a denarius, that I may see it." Tribute was paid, not in the Jewish money used for Temple purposes, but in the Roman silver coinage. When a denarius had been handed to Jesus He asked, "Whose is this image and superscription?" He held up to their view the coin, bearing on one of its sides a medallion of the emperor, and on the other the name of the emperor and his title of Pontifex Maximus.

The Tribute Money

They said unto Him, "Cæsar's." And by their Mark xii. answer they had replied to their own question. 13-17. For it was an accepted principle that when any king's coinage was current, that king's sovereignty was recognised. Their own Rabbis had laid down that law for them. "Render unto Cæsar," said Jesus, "the things that are Cæsar's."

But that scarcely brings out the exact force The Snare
Avoided. of the Greek. The question the Pharisees and Herodians had asked was, "Shall we give?" Jesus's reply is, "Give back, pay unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's." By accepting the advantages of Cæsar's rule, they had also consented to its obligations. They had traded as Roman subjects; they must pay the Roman tribute. The payment of tribute had become a matter of obligation and debt. "Pay back," He said, and perhaps there was a touch of scorn in His voice as He said it, "to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's," and He added, "and to God the things that are God's." He had answered their question; and yet He had avoided their snare. Yes, and He had done more. He had laid down a profound and permanent principle. "And they marvelled greatly at Him," says Mark (ver. 17). The word is an exceptionally strong one—"they were utterly amazed at Him"—not simply at the ease with which He foiled their plot, but with the wisdom of His answer. And who knows but that some of these men may have been constrained to ask in wonder, "Who is this?" and, though they went to ensnare and catch

Mark xii. Him, may have stayed to worship and adore
I3-I7. Him ?

Duties to
the State.

Now, as I said just a moment ago, this answer of our Lord's is far more than a happy way of escape out of what looked like an inextricable difficulty, it is a satisfying answer ; it lays down great principles which avail for guidance in every similar difficulty. Primarily, the topic in debate was the duty men owe to civil government. The Pharisees thought that they were by their loyalty to God forbidden to pay tribute to Cæsar. In other words, they felt that religion interfered with their civil obedience. The principle Christ lays down here is that those who accept the privileges of the State must discharge the just demands of the State. Christ was no Anarchist. He recognised the necessity and utility of rulers and governments. There was a certain sphere of human life within which they had a right to the exercise of authority. The Apostle was only interpreting Christ's mind when He said, "The powers that be are ordained of God" (Rom. xiii. 1).

**Our
Obedience to
the State.**

Everyone who accepts the advantages of the rule of the State is bound to discharge his just obligations to the State ; that is the principle here laid down. Take our own case. Our English citizenship confers upon us great privileges. The State, for instance, cares for our safety. By means of its armies and its fleet it has warded off from us the dangers of foreign attack. By means of its system of law it

The Tribute Money

safeguards our persons and property. And, in Mark xii. order to be able to do all this, the State ¹³⁻¹⁷. makes certain demands upon us in the way of taxes. Now what our Lord here says is that no man has a right to receive the advantages of membership in this English State unless he is willing to discharge his duties to the English State. It is the same when you come to the narrower sphere of municipal life. Every well-ordered municipality does a multitude of things for our comfort and well-being. It makes and keeps our roads ; it lights our streets ; it looks after the health of our town ; it maintains a staff of police for our protection. Now if we accept the benefit of all this, we must pay for it. If we enjoy the benefits of the municipality, we must discharge our duties to the municipality. In other words, the demand-notes of the Income Tax commissioner and of the rate-collector have a certain Divine authority behind them. People are all too apt to think that if they can cheat the State or the municipality, there is not much harm in it. As a matter of fact, what Jesus teaches here is, that the payment of our rates and taxes is a religious duty. "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's."

And yet the obedience which Jesus here commands us to render is not unlimited. The State has its own province, and within that province it has a right to obedience. But there is a province in which the king's writ and the corporation's demand note do not run. "Render unto Cæsar —With its Limitation.

Mark xii. the things that are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's." The Pharisees were right in thinking that when the State made demands which clashed with their sense of what was due to God, it might be their duty to disobey the State. But that point had not been reached by this demand for tribute. There the State was well within its rights. But there was this limitation upon State right and the obedience of subject; it was all subject to consideration for the rights of God. "We must obey God rather than men," said Peter to the Sanhedrin (Acts v. 29). In seeking to interfere with their convictions and stifle their witness, the authorities had travelled beyond their province. Scores and hundreds of Christians refused to sacrifice incense to the emperor in the early days; they disobeyed the command of the State, preferring to be loyal to God, even though it cost them their lives. Scores of people here in England refused to turn back to Rome at the bidding of Queen Mary; they disobeyed the command of the State, preferring to be loyal to God, even though it meant dying in the flames of Smithfield. The duty of obedience to the State is not unlimited. It is subject always to our obedience to God. "My authority ends," said Napoleon in a wise and weighty sentence, "where the authority of conscience begins." That is why, when the State travels beyond its province, it may be resisted and disobeyed.

But after all the emphasis of our Lord's saying is not on the negative limitation, but upon the

The Tribute Money

positive duty. These Pharisees, in their excitement about this tribute money, were forgetting the weightier matter of the Law. They would no doubt have defended their objection to Rome, on the ground of their allegiance to God. "And to God the things that are God's," said Jesus to them. All this fret and fume about the Roman tax was not what God really wanted. Their debt to God was far other than they conceived. "What did God want?" "Son," that is the Divine answer, "give Me thine heart." All this fuss about the independence of Israel did not compensate God for the refusal of the heart. "Give back—pay to God the things that are God's." For this also is but the discharge of a debt. God has put His image and superscription upon the heart of man, and we are defrauding God of His due if we do not give Him a consecrated and devoted heart.

Have we given God His due? Have we given to God the things that are God's? Have we given our hearts to Him? We shall give every one else his due, if first of all we give God His. But the mischief of it is, so many of us fail just here. We give God's things to Cæsar. We give our hearts to money and pleasure and social position, and so God never gets His own from us. "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness," then everything else will be added unto us; everything else will fall into its proper place; everything else will receive its legitimate due. We shall know exactly what to

A Question
for Ourselves.

St Mark x. 32—xiii. 37

Mark xii. give Cæsar when we have honestly given to God
13-17. the things that are God's. Life will be balanced,
proportionate, orderly and fair, when we are ready
to say to God

“Take my heart, my Lord, I pour
At Thy feet its treasure store.
Take myself, and I will be,
Ever, only, all for Thee.”

XIII

THE LIFE OF THE WORLD TO COME

"Then come unto Him the Sadducees, which say there is no resurrection ; and they asked Him, saying, Master, Moses wrote unto us, If a man's brother die, and leave his wife behind him, and leave no children, that his brother should take his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. Now there were seven brethren : and the first took a wife, and dying left no seed. And the second took her, and died, neither left he any seed : and the third likewise. And the seven had her, and left no seed : last of all the woman died also. In the resurrection therefore, when they shall rise, whose wife shall she be of them ? for the seven had her to wife. And Jesus answering said unto them, Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the scriptures, neither the power of God ? For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage ; but are as the angels which are in heaven. And as touching the dead, that they rise : have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob ? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living : ye therefore do greatly err."—MARK xii. 18-27.

WHENEVER I read this paragraph I am left Mark xii. wondering at the audacity and conceit of the 18-27. Sadducees. I should have thought that the ^{More} ^{Questions.} way in which Jesus answered first of all the priests and the elders, and then the Pharisees and Herodians, and not only answered them, but

Mark xii. 18-27. covered them with confusion, would have warned off every other plotting questioner. I should have thought that the way, the effortless way, in which Jesus escaped the snares priests and elders and Pharisees and Herodians so cunningly laid for Him, would have been sufficient to teach anyone the lesson that it was a poor and hopeless business to catch Jesus in His words. But apparently it took two more questions and two more answers from the lips of Christ to persuade these people that the man was not born who could entrap Him in His speech.

The
Sadducees
and their
Problem.

There were people who thought that where priests and elders, Pharisees and Herodians have failed, they might succeed. Possibly the failure of the Pharisees spurred them on to make their attempt. They may have relished the discomfiture of the Pharisees; they may have chuckled over the way in which Jesus made them and their question both ridiculous. At any rate, they thought they saw an opportunity of catching Christ, and scoring off their rivals at the same time. They came with an air of insolent confidence. Christ's triumph over His other questioners had not even taught them humility. They pay Him no compliment. There is no deference in their attitude, such as the Pharisees and Herodians had shown. They come in the manner of "superior persons." They submit their precious problem, which was meant to demonstrate the absurdity

The Life of the World to Come

of the resurrection-belief to Jesus, and the tone **Mark xii.** they adopt is as if they would say, "There! 18-27. Answer that, if you can."

Let us look at the questioners, and then ^{The} _{Sadducees} and their at their question. These men were Sadducees. They belonged to the party who were the Tenets. Rationalists of their day. Numerically they were not a large party; they were, indeed, a small minority of the nation. But they were the aristocratic party and the official party, and these things of course gave them influence and importance. In matters of faith they had, if I may so put it, ■ different Bible from the Pharisees. The Pharisees laid great store by the "traditions of the elders"; the Sadducees repudiated them. It is said that they rejected the Prophets and the Psalms, and accepted only the Books of Moses. At any rate, if they did not wholly reject them, they gave them an entirely inferior and subordinate place. The Pentateuch—the Books of the Law—was their rule of faith and practice, and to all intents and purposes constituted their Bible. Now the hope of immortality does not shine very brightly in the Books they received. What glimmerings we get of this great truth are found mostly in the prophets and the Psalms. In the Books of the Law, immortality and the resurrection are scarcely referred to. And, taking the Book of the Law as their Bible, the Sadducees denied the resurrection, personal immortality, and retribution in a future life. Wealthy

St Mark x. 32—xiii. 37

Mark xii. and comfortable themselves, they felt no need,
18-27. as one writer puts it, for a future life
to compensate for the inequalities of the
present.

Their
Problem.

The problem which they submitted to Jesus was meant to show the absurdity of a belief in a resurrection. It was based on a familiar feature in Jewish life. To be childless was almost the greatest calamity a Jew could conceive of. So long as a Jew had descendants, some sort of immortality seemed to be his. To meet this craving for the perpetuation of the name, Moses had laid down the law that in the case of brothers living together, in case the elder should marry, and die without children, instead of allowing a "stranger" to marry the widow, and so letting the elder brother's name perish, the second brother should marry the widow, and any issue of this second marriage should be considered in law to be the son of the dead brother, and should perpetuate his name. This custom is known as the Levirate Law. Starting from this law, the Sadducees state a case which they thought reduced the doctrine of a resurrection to an absurdity. There were seven brothers, they said. The first married, and died childless. The second took the widow to wife, and likewise died childless. She passed in succession to all seven, and all seven died childless. Then the woman died last of all. Now, they ask triumphantly, in the resurrection life, of which you speak, whose wife shall she be?

The Life of the World to Come

Now Jesus might fairly have declined to answer Mark xii. this question. It was asked in levity, and He 18-27. might have answered it with scorn. This was ^{A Possible.} Answer. an imaginary case the Sadducees had submitted to Him. The contingency they pictured could hardly have taken place. Moreover, according to the very Law they quote, the woman was not "married" to the second brother. To quote the exact words of the old ordinance, he would "perform the duty of an husband's brother unto her" (Deut. xxv. 5). That would probably have been the answer a Pharisee would have given. But Jesus does not repay levity with scorn; He does not brush aside the whole miserable question with contempt. For the sake, not simply of His questioners, but of them that stood by, His own disciples perhaps, who had often been puzzled and perplexed by difficulties like these, He gave it an answer which made faith in the resurrection and the life beyond easier for all who heard it.

Let us turn to the answer of Christ. Re- The Lord's member the question in dispute is not the marriage law, but the resurrection life. "Ye do err," He said to His questioners, "not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God" (Matt. xxii. 29). The Sadducees had come up to Jesus quite confident that they were going to expose both Jesus and the Pharisees, as being grotesquely and absurdly mistaken in their belief about a resurrection. Jesus fastens the charge of error upon them. Their whole difficulty about the resurrection arose from mistaken views of what

Mark xii. the resurrection meant. Their objection proceeded on the assumption that the resurrection life was simply a continuation of life down here. They took it for granted that all the relationships of earth would be resumed in heaven. They thought of the life beyond in terms of life in the flesh. As Dr Chadwick puts it, "They had no conception that the body can be raised otherwise than as it perished; and consequently they imagined all sorts of unhappy complications as likely to follow such a resurrection."

The
Sadducees'
Error based
on
Ignorance.

—Ignorance
of the Power
of God.

It was from this initial blunder that all their difficulties arose. Clever men though they thought themselves to be, they were wrong in the very premises from which they started, and their mistake, Jesus goes on to say, was due to two reasons: (1) They were ignorant of the Scriptures, (2) they made no allowance for the power of God. It is with the second mistake that our Lord deals first. The difficulties of the Sadducees about the resurrection life were due to this first of all—that they made no allowance for the power of God. They assumed that the new life was simply a reproduction of the life here. They assumed that the body that is is the body that shall be. They made absolutely no allowance for any exercise of the power of God. Clever people though they were, they were the kind of person Paul addresses when he says, "Thou foolish one, . . . that which thou sowest, thou sowest not the body that shall be, but a bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some

The Life of the World to Come

other kind ; but God giveth it a body even as it **Mark xii.** pleased Him" (1 Cor. xv. 30, 37). It was God **18-27.** the Sadducees had left out of their calculation in all their thoughts about a future life. Had they known the power of God, they would have known that what is is no measure of what may be. And that is our answer still to all difficulties about the future life. We remember the great power of God. There are difficulties, and we all feel them. There are many questions we cannot answer. But we may rest our hearts in the remembrance of the "power of God." With God all things are possible.

And then our Lord proceeds to hint to these **In Relation to** Sadducees one of those mighty changes which shall be brought about in the resurrection life **the Resurrection Life.** by the power of God. The entire conditions of life shall be altered. "For when they shall rise from the dead," He said, "they neither marry, nor are given in marriage ; but are as angels in heaven" (ver. 25). These words of our Lord have struck a chill into loving and united hearts before to-day. But really there is no threat of the dissolution of any affectionate and enriching relationship, when we rightly understand them. Let us try to see exactly what they mean. We are apt to forget that human life as it is, is not human life as God meant it to be. Death is in the world. Now marriage is the counterpoise of death. Marriage **—And to** is God's ordinance for the replenishing of the **Marriage.** life of this world, which otherwise would be

Mark xii. destroyed by the ravages of death. But in the
18-27. world to come death is swallowed up of life.

One feature of the New Jerusalem which John delights to dwell upon is this—"there shall be no more death"; and because there is no more death, there is no more need of marriage. Marriage becomes an anachronism. So far as marriage has a physical basis—and it is on the physical basis of marriage the question of the Sadducees proceeded—it is an earthly thing. It has no place in the heavenly kingdom. But love is not dependent on marriage. And the love is the all-important and essential thing. Husband and wife shall be as dear to one another in the world to come as they are down here. Only the relationship between them shall be sublimed of every suggestion of the earthly; it shall not be "marriage" any more, it shall be something more glorious and beautiful than marriage. It will be love, without a touch of earth about it—love, holy, sacred, perfect. "They shall not marry," no, but we shall know each other and love each other, and contribute to each other's gladness there as here.

The Life of
the World to
Come.

The life beyond has a natural fascination for us. So many of our friends are already in it; we ourselves are hastening towards it. So we are eager to know what it is like. We try to peer through the veil that hides it from us. But it is only "broken glimpses" of the life beyond that the Bible gives us. The Koran gives the Mahomedan a detailed and sensuous account

The Life of the World to Come

of the joys of his Paradise ; the Bible contents ^{18-27.} **Mark xii.** itself with hints and suggestions and gleams of the glory. It does not draw back the veil. "Eye saw not, and ear heard not. . . . Whatsoever things God hath prepared for them that love Him" (1 Cor. i. 9). About heaven, we have to walk by faith, not by sight. But even the scattered hints and suggestions we get in the Bible are sufficient to fill us with joy unspeakable and full of glory. The life of heaven is not loss, but immeasurable gain.

I am not going to attempt to describe for you —^{Its} **Fulness.** a life which the Bible has purposely left obscure and veiled. I content myself with simply saying this, we shall miss nothing in heaven that is really worth having. Heaven will rob us of no real joy, of no genuine delight, of no enriching love. Heaven means joy at its full : happiness in its perfection. Now the holy gift of love is the very gladness of our life. The love of wife for husband, and of husband for wife ; the love of parent for child, and child for parent—it is love that makes life sunny for us ; it is love that constitutes its joy. Without love, life itself would be of nothing worth. And heaven is not going to rob us of such love. "Love is of God," says John, "and everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God" (1 John iv. 7). Love is a bit of heaven on earth ; it is a bit of the eternal in time. "Love is of God," and therefore love is eternal. For can anything that is "of God" die ? That love is the symbol of

St Mark x. 32—xiii. 37

Mark xii. eternity is not beautiful poetry merely ; it is good theology as well. And so this love of ours will abide, only cleansed and purified and glorified. It does not end at the grave. It is not buried in the coffin. You remember the inscription on the gravestone that marks the place where Charles Kingsley and his wife both lie buried : *Amarimus, Amamus, Amabimus*, "We have loved, we love, we shall love." We shall continue to love, all through the age of eternity. And so I say to any who have loved ones within the veil, *Sursum Corda ! Lift up your hearts ! Love shall abide, only it shall lose its dross.*

"As
Angels."

"They neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as angels in heaven." "As angels." We shall not become angels. The difference between angels and men will still subsist. They are unfallen beings; we are sinners redeemed. But in the new life we shall be as angels, in the sense that we shall be spiritual, not fleshly beings. That word in itself was sufficient to demolish the Sadducean difficulty. They were arguing as if up yonder, just as down here, we should still be fleshly and perishing beings. No, says Jesus ; up yonder we shall be "as angels," spiritual and immortal. "As angels," what a prospect ! For the angel is a pure and holy being, of a whiteness as unsullied as that of a dove's wing. And you and I shall, in the life of the world to come, be "as angels." And the angel is for ever engaged in the holy service of God. And you and I, whose service is now

The Life of the World to Come

so broken and fitful, shall then be constant and **Mark xii.**
devoted, for we shall be "as angels." The **18-27.**
angels gaze ever upon the glory of God. And
you and I, who here catch only fleeting glimpses,
and see through a glass darkly, shall then be
"as angels." So let us be of good cheer. We
do not know everything about the world to
come. But we know this: we lose nothing
that is worth keeping. Life will be enriched,
deepened, glorified for us. We shall be "as
angels." Let us leave it there. Let us
remember the "great power of God." Let us
content ourselves with this, "In Thy presence
is fulness of joy; in Thy right hand there are
pleasures for evermore" (Psa. xvi. 11).

XIV

THE RESURRECTION

"And as touching the dead, that they rise: have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?"—MARK xii. 26.

Mark xii. 26. OUR Lord's reply to the Sadducees asserts that this time, at any rate, the people at large were

Simple Hearts and Simple Faith. right, and they, the Sadducees, the clever people, the superior people, the cultured people, were

wrong. As a matter of fact, culture is apt to be more than a little critical of religion. The superior person sometimes looks down with a touch of superciliousness and scorn upon the simple faith of the humble and trusting soul. But when it comes to religious truth, I would far rather trust the simple heart than the merely cultivated mind, the instinct of the Christian commonalty than the judgment of the "superior person." For when it comes to religion, to God and the soul and the eternal life, the intellect is not the sole, or even the chief organ of knowledge. *Pectus facit theologium*, says the old proverb. "It is the heart that makes the theologian." The man of loving and open heart knows more, and sees further into spiritual

The Resurrection

truth than the man only of keen and cultivated **Mark xii.** mind. How does the Beatitude run, "Blessed **26.** are the cultivated in mind?" No. "Blessed are the trained in intellect?" No. But "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." The Jewish people at large believed eagerly, passionately in a resurrection and a life beyond the grave. These Sadducees, the clever, cultured people, scoffed at the belief. But it was the Sadducees, and not the people, who were wrong. It was only another illustration of things being hidden from the wise and prudent, and revealed unto babes.

We have already dealt with one cause of their "Not mistake. There was another; and it was this—^{the} Knowing "Is it not for this cause that ye err," Jesus said to ^{the} Scriptures." them, "that ye know not the Scriptures?" (ver. 24). That was a startling charge to bring against these Sadducees, for no doubt they were well versed in those portions of the Old Testament which they reckoned as Scripture. But it is possible to read the Scriptures without knowing them, it is possible to be letter-perfect in them without understanding them. There is, in literary history, a curious example of reading without understanding. John Milton was one of the best, and most gifted men God ever gave to England. But there is no great man without his foibles, and John Milton had his. Though he had views on education that were far in advance of his time, he did not believe in the education of women. So he would not allow his daughters to learn languages; one tongue, he used to say

St Mark x. 32—xiii. 37

Mark xii. with a gibe, was enough for a woman. But,
26. when his eyesight failed, it was essential that

his daughters should be able to read to him in various languages. So he went to the trouble of teaching them how to pronounce the words, but not what the words meant. Thus they had to read to their father in Latin, Italian and Greek without understanding a single word. But is not there a great deal of Bible-reading of that sort? Men read the words without grasping the truth. "Understandest thou what thou readest?" asked Philip of the Ethiopian eunuch. "How can I," replied that humble soul, "except some one shall guide me"? (Acts viii. 31, 32). He was reading without understanding. And many beside the Ethiopian were doing the same thing only they had not the humility to confess it. Take that fifty-third chapter of Isaiah which the Eunuch was reading. Had not the whole Jewish nation read it without understanding it? They were familiar with its words; but as far as realising the truth taught by it, the great passage might as well never have been in the Book of the Prophet at all.

**How to
Understand.**

And we do that same thing still. We often read the Scriptures without understanding them, just exactly as we may say our prayers without praying. We have our Scripture-reading leagues; we pledge ourselves to read some portion of this Holy Book every day. So far, so good! But remember, it is possible to have a superficial knowledge of Scripture, and to miss its vital

The Resurrection

points. You may know its sentences off by Mark xii. heart, and miss its spirit. The letter killeth ; it *26.* is the Spirit that giveth life. To know your Bible, you want more than ability to read. You want an illumined mind, a mind illumined by the Spirit of God. It is the Spirit who breathes upon the Word, and brings the truth to light. You want also the obedient will. To understand the Word, you must be a doer of it, as well as a reader. "He that doeth the will," said Jesus, "shall know of the teaching." To know the Scriptures, you need, then, more equipment than the schools can supply—you need prayer, obedience and the Spirit's light.

"Ye know not the Scriptures," said Jesus of ^{the Un-}these Sadducees. He illustrates and substantiates ^{observed} _{Truth.} His charge by quoting them a passage out of the Pentateuch. He does not quote either Psalmist or Prophet. The Sadducees would not have acknowledged their authority. He goes to the Books they themselves acknowledged as authoritative Scripture. And out of their authoritative Scripture He quotes perhaps the most familiar passage of all—a passage as familiar to them as, let us say, "Our Father" is to us. The doctrine of immortality—which these Sadducees denied—was in their Scriptures all the time, if they had eyes to see it, and in the most familiar passages too. "But as touching the dead, that they are raised," said Jesus; "have ye not read in the book of Moses, in the place concerning the Bush, how God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of

St Mark x. 32—xiii. 37

Mark xii. 26. Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob ? ” (ver. 26). Why, yes, they had read the passage scores, hundreds, thousands of times. But immortality and the resurrection are involved and implied in the passage ; for “ God,” said Jesus, “ is not the God of the dead, but of the living.” They had read without understanding. “ Ye do greatly err,” said Jesus.

Christ's Argument for Immortality.

Now let us look for a moment at Christ’s argument for immortality as He states it here. The Sadducees made quite sure that there was no immortality in the Pentateuch. The doctrine was ■ later accretion, they said, and had no place in the revelation made to their great Lawgiver. Now it would have been passing strange if the Jews—God’s chosen and peculiar people—had been left without witness of the world beyond. For the instinct for immortality is everywhere. Tennyson’s lines,

“ Thou madest man he knows not why,
He thinks he was not made to die,”

represent the universal belief. I say, it would have been passing strange, it would have been inexplicable, if the Jews had not shared in the expectation. But, as a matter of fact, Jesus finds the hope, almost the assertion, of immortality embedded in these Scriptures of the Law to which the Sadducees so confidently appealed. He recalls to their minds that familiar passage in which the story of the appearance of God to Moses in the Bush is told, and in the name God

The Resurrection

gives to Himself there our Lord finds the fact of **Mark xii.**
immortality taken for granted.

26.

What is the argument which Christ here—Founded
propounds? It is the argument for immortality ^{on the} _{Character of}
which is based upon the character of God. There _{God.}
is an argument for immortality which is based
upon the nature of man. The very fact that man
is a moral being, that he cherishes ambitions and
hopes which in this life never get realised; the
fact that there is so much incompleteness and
waste in life; and that there are such serious
inequalities that need to be rectified—all these
things argue a life beyond the grave, unless you
are to write down this world as a chaos, and life
as a torture and a mockery. But there is a
stronger argument for immortality than that which
is based upon the nature of man, and that is the
argument which grounds itself upon the character
of God. It is that mightiest and most irrefrag-
able of arguments that Christ advances here.

Let us see what this argument amounts to. The
This was how God announced Himself to Moses ^{Announce-}
at the Bush: "I am the God of Abraham, and _{ment of}
the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Now
in that title which God then applied to Himself
the doctrine of immortality is involved. For the
God who revealed Himself to Moses in the Bush
was a God able to enter into covenant relations
with men; who admitted men into His friend-
ship and fellowship. He became Abraham's God,
Isaac's God, Jacob's God. There was a covenant
between these men and Him. They pledged and

Mark xii. plighted themselves one to another. It was not
26. a case simply of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob giving
themselves to God; God entered into relations
—Not one of them. But could such relations be merely
merely temporary? Could death rob God of His friends?
Passing Relationship. Did God pledge Himself to Abraham, saying, "I
am thy God, and thine exceeding great reward,"
if the grave were to be the end of it all? You
perhaps remember how Omar Khayyam describes
the relationship between men and God:

" We are no other than a moving row
Of magic Shadow-shapes that come and go
Round with the Sun-illumined Lantern held
In midnight by the Master of the Show;
But helpless pieces of the game He plays
Upon this chequer-board of Nights and Days;
Hither and thither moves, and checks and slays,
And one by one back in the closet lays."

Of course, if men are no more to God than the pieces on the chess-board are to the player, if they are mere puppets with which He amuses Himself, then we are robbed of our argument for immortality, and we shall conclude, with the old Persian poet, that this life is all, and we had better make the best of it. But that is not the picture of God suggested by our Lord's reference. That is not the God we know by our own personal experience. Men are not with Him mere pieces in the game. They are His friends. And the fact that God makes a friend of man, enters into personal relationships with him, is a pledge of immortality. It is impossible that death should

The Resurrection

rob God of His friend. The character of God is **Mark xii.** at stake. For to say otherwise, is to say that ^{26.} death, and not God, is Lord of the world.

This truth you find expressed by Christ Himself. A Sure "Father," He said, as He hung adying, "into Thy ^{Instinct of} hands I commend My spirit." You find it on the lips of the Apostles. "I am persuaded," wrote St Paul, "that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. viii. 38, 39). You find it on the lips of seers and poets.

"For though from out the bourne of time and space
My bark should wander far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face,
When I have crossed the bar."

So wrote Tennyson. "God is love," said Browning. "I build on that," and so he "greets the unseen with a cheer." All this is a sure instinct of the soul. If we can enter into loving fellowship with God, into personal relations with Him—and there are thousands and tens of thousands to testify that we can—then it is impossible that death should be the end. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the ratification of that instinct. His coming back has told us that that instinct was true. Yonder, as here, we are in our Father's hands. Nothing can separate us from Him. There are many things we do not know about the beyond, but we can say, with Whittier,

St Mark x. 32—xiii. 37

**Mark xii.
26.**

“I know not where His islands lift
Their fronded palms in air;
I simply know I cannot drift
Beyond His love and care.”

And that is enough. Yonder, as here, we shall
be with Him. It is impossible that God’s friends
should die.

XV

THE GREAT COMMANDMENT

"And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that He had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all ? And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel ; The Lord our God is one Lord : And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength : this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these. And the scribe said unto Him, Well, Master, Thou hast said the truth : for there is one God ; and there is none other but He : and to love Him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices. And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, He said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that durst ask Him any question."—MARK xii. 28-34.

MATTHEW in his account of this incident says Mark xii. that this question, like the questions about 28-34. authority and tribute and the resurrection, was The Scribe. asked with an evil motive. He says that the lawyer asked him a question, tempting him. Mark gives a kindlier interpretation of his action. It is obvious that the Scribe had been in the group of listeners who had heard Christ's answers first to the priests, and then to the Pharisees

St Mark x. 32—xiii. 37

Mark xii. and Herodians, and finally to the Sadducees. I believe that at the first he had desired the discomfiture of Christ. For like all his class he was prejudiced against Him, and bitterly hostile to His claims. But as he listened to Christ's wonderful replies, as he recognised not simply their dexterity and ease, but also their reach and depth, his prejudice changed to a great wonder, and his hate became converted into an almost worshipful admiration.

—An
Honest
Enquirer.

This Scribe, in spite of all his prejudices, was a man of candid mind and honest heart. He did not try to explain away Christ's answers, as the Pharisees tried to explain away his works by attributing them to Beelzebub. He recognised that there was Divine wisdom and truth in Christ's answer. He recognised that here was a Teacher of rare and wonderful insight who trod firmly when the best of human teachers only faltered. And recognising that, "knowing," as Mark puts it, "that he had answered them well," he thought he would ask him a question of his own. I think he asked it because he honestly wished to know and because he believed that Jesus could tell him. If you will look at the question you will see it differs entirely from all the others that had been submitted to Christ. The others were every one of them tricky and obviously meant to ensnare Him. This question is plain, direct, straightforward. There is no "catch" about it. The other questions were obviously made up and dealt with paltry and imaginary

The Great Commandment

difficulties, this question equally obviously goes **Mark xii.**
down to root and deals with a vital issue. **28-34.**

It is a great question asked in all seriousness His and earnestness. For the Scribe was seriously Perplexity. perplexed about this matter. This question about the first commandment was, indeed, one of the vexed questions of the schools. The Rabbis held that the Law contained six hundred and thirteen precepts, distinguished as "heavy" and "light." Very keen was the disputation betwixt the strict school of Shammai and the more liberal school of Hillel as to the distinction between these precepts. It was commonly agreed that there were "heavy" precepts to which the penalty of death was attached: and these were, in the main, laws regarding circumcision, the eating of unleavened bread, Sabbath observance, sacrifice and purification. Now, I believe that this Scribe had had his doubts for long enough as to whether these ceremonial precepts were really the weighty and serious things of the law; that for a long time he had an uneasy consciousness that these things could not be the principal things in religion. He saw, now, an opportunity of resolving his doubts, of getting guidance upon what was to him an urgent and vital matter. Recognising the Divine Wisdom that spoke through the words of Christ, he braved the astonishment and scorn that revealed themselves in the faces of his companions, and as an "anxious enquirer" brought his difficulty to Christ.

St Mark x. 32—xiii. 37

**Mark xii.
28-34.**

**—His
Question.**

“Of what kind,” he asked, “is the first commandment of all”? Our English rendering scarcely reproduces the exact force of the Greek. It was not numerical order he had in mind. “First in this context means principal,” or, as John Wesley put it, “the most necessary to be observed.” The Rabbis’ distinction between the “heavy” and the “light” was in his mind. Were the ceremonial precepts, upon which the Rabbis laid such immense stress, after all, the principal things in the law? Did the Law lay the emphasis upon the ceremonial or the moral obligation? Was ritual in very truth the principal thing in religion? That was the information which his question asked for.

**The Lord's
Answer.**

Jesus answered, “The first is, Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God the Lord is One: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. The second is this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.” When our Lord gave that reply, He answered all that was involved and implied in the Scribe’s question. He read this man’s heart like an open book. I believe that He saw there the incipient revolt against the deadly formalism and externalism of current Judaism. He saw before Him a soul genuinely anxious to know what was the essential thing in religion. And He gave him his answer. In effect He said, “The principal commandment, the essential thing in religion is *love*—*love* to

The Great Commandment

God, and love to man. Among the six hundred Mark xii. and thirteen precepts of your law there is none 28-34. greater than this."

In giving that answer Jesus told the Scribe all —The he wanted to know. The Rabbis laid emphasis Answer Desired. upon circumcision, upon sacrifice, upon Sabbath observance. These were to them the "weighty matters" of the Law. But of these external, mechanical, and merely ceremonial obligations the Lord said not a word. He declared to this Scribe and through him to the wide world and to all time that religion is not ceremonial but moral, that the thing that really matters is not outward rite but the love and consecration of the heart. As compared with the Judaism then practised and taught by the Rabbis this was an altogether new view of religion. The Jews had exalted the ceremonial at the expense of the moral. They had tithed mint and anise and cummin and neglected justice, mercy and truth. Jesus restored the moral obligation to its supreme place and left ceremonialism entirely out of account.

The Scribe's heart leaped up in joyful response The Scribe's Response. to our Lord's declaration. It met and satisfied the deep instincts of his soul. He set himself by the Lord's side. He adopted the Lord's view. To this extent at any rate he proclaimed himself in sympathy with Jesus. "Teacher," he exclaimed, "Thou hast said truly that He is One and there is none other but He; to love Him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour

Mark. xii 28-34. as himself is much more than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices." And upon this discerning answer of the Scribe's our Lord put the stamp of His approval when He turned and said to him, "Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God."

The Moral
and the
Ceremonial
in Religion.

On the whole, then, this colloquy between Jesus and the Scribe resolves itself into a statement as to the relative place of the moral and the ceremonial in religion. And the teaching of the incident is that the moral demand is everything and that the ceremonial does not count. A certain amount of ceremonial appears to be inseparable from religion. We seem as if we cannot engage in worship without some amount of form. We have an order of service; we stand to sing; we kneel and close our eyes to pray; though these customs are not universal. A certain amount of ceremonialism seems, then, to be inseparable from religion. And at the beginning no doubt every ceremony was adopted as being helpful to worship. Much of such ceremony was, in its inception, symbolic. But the danger of all ceremonialism is that the thing signified should be lost sight of in the symbol itself. That is what happened in Judaism. The Jews thought everything of the visible and external act and nothing of the inward feeling the act was supposed to represent; everything of the offering and nothing of the surrendered will; everything of the lamb and nothing of the penitent heart. And so among the Jews religion was choked and smothered out of existence by ritual, and the prophet could say

The Great Commandment

that amongst them wickedness and worship went **Mark xii.** hand in hand. It was so in Christ's own day. 28-34.

But it was no new development of Christ's time. It was the besetting peril of Israel all through its history. The people were always confusing ritual with religion. Against that confusion the prophets made ceaseless protest. It was the burden of the prophet's witness that religion was not external but spiritual, not mechanical but moral.

In this respect, Jesus Christ took up the protest **Our Lord's Testimony.** of the prophets. He called men back to the true idea of religion. "The essential things," said the Rabbis, "are circumcision and Sabbath keeping and sacrifice." "No," said Jesus, "the essential thing is to have the heart right with God. Religion is not outward but inward; its demands are not ceremonial but moral: it is not a posture of the body but an attitude of the heart." "Thou shalt love the Lord Thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength, and thy neighbour as thyself." No man, in fine, is religious, however scrupulous as to ritual he may be, until he love God and his neighbour thus. And the man who loves God and his neighbour thus is religious though he observe no ceremonial at all.

We have not got beyond the need of this —**Its Application To-day.** teaching of our Lord's even in these days of ours. I have already said that I believe a certain amount of ceremonialism to be inseparable from religion, especially upon its public side; and further, that to certain natures ceremonialism may

Mark xii. be helpful. At the same time we do well to
28-34. look with a jealous eye upon any tendency to emphasise ceremonial. We know how quickly men lose sight of the spiritual in the mechanical; how easily ritual may come to take the place of religion. At the bottom, it is this emphasis upon rite and ceremony that, more than anything else, sunders the Church and keeps Christ's people apart to-day.

Rites and Rifts.

Our schisms and divisions spring not so much from differences on questions of faith, as from differences about questions of order, rite and ceremony. These divisions, which are our weakness and shame, could never have arisen if we had really taken to heart Christ's teaching in this place that the essential thing in religion is love—love to God and love to one's neighbour. And as this emphasis on ceremonial so largely occasions the divisions of Christendom, so is it also a peril to individual souls. Lay the emphasis on ceremony and is it not fatally easy for people to think that when they have performed the ceremony they have done everything? Here, to a large extent, may be the reason why religion to-day is so formal and barren and cold. The idea many people have of religion is that it means attending at public worship, possibly, also, paying a pew rent, subscribing more or less generously to religious objects, and participating in the Lord's Supper. Unhappily it is possible to do all that and to have no scrap of true religion in the soul. The essence of religion is love to God issuing in love to man. Our Church going,

The Great Commandment

our religious services, our holy sacraments are **Mark xii.** only means to an end ; they are meant to teach **28-34.** and help us to *love*. When they are exalted into ends in themselves they become the death of religion. God is not satisfied with our outward religious observances. Do we love Him ? that is the critical question. Religion is not a ceremonial demand, it is a moral and spiritual demand, and we are not religious until God is enthroned within and we love Him with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind, and with all our strength.

That the Scribe should recognise all this ; "Not far from the Kingdom." better than all burnt-offerings and sacrifices showed that he had an honest heart ; and more, it showed that he was an earnest seeker after truth. This man was no dilettante in religion. He wanted the real thing. And the Lord, when He noted his candour, his earnestness, and his spiritual sympathy, said to him : "Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God." "Not far from the Kingdom": there is scarcely a phrase in the Gospels so pregnant with hope and fear as this little phrase. "Not far"—did he actually enter in ? "Not far"—or was he after all shut out ? Both possibilities seem wrapped up in the phrase. I would give a great deal to know the after history of this Scribe ; but Scripture leaves him here—"not far from the Kingdom."

"Not far from the Kingdom," how aptly it **Modern Parallels.** describes the condition of many in our own

Mark xii. midst. They have a wistful desire for the truth, 28-34. they have an admiration for Christ, they have a keen interest in religion, they come regularly to worship and yet they never take the final step and openly avow their faith in Christ. "Not far from the Kingdom"—and yet not in it. For, as Dr Chadwick says, we may know and admire and confess the greatness and goodness of Jesus without forsaking all to follow Him.

A Tragic Position.

There is somethings pecially tragic about the case of those who are "so near and yet so far." The case of the young man who went away because he had great possessions has an additional note of tragedy in it because he came so near and yet fell away. "A miss," we say, "is as good as a mile." We may be Church goers, and Church members, we may take an interest in religious matters and yet come short of the Kingdom. To be *in* the Kingdom we must not only *know* what religion is, as this Scribe did ; we must practise it. We must not only admire Christ and praise Him ; we must obey Him and love Him. There is not one of us "far from the Kingdom." But are we in it ? Do we love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength ? Do we really obey and follow Christ ? Is there any one of us who after having come so near will yet fall away ? Happy are we if we can say that "we are not of them that shrink back unto perdition; but of them that have faith unto the saving of the soul" (Heb. x. 39).

XVI

GREAT DAVID'S GREATER SON

"And Jesus answered and said, while He taught in the temple, How say the scribes that Christ is the son of David ? For David himself said by the Holy Ghost, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit Thou on My right hand, till I make Thine enemies Thy footstool. David therefore himself calleth Him Lord ; and whence is He then his son ? And the common people heard him gladly."—MARK xii. 35-37.

"AND no man," we read at the close of our Lord's Mark xii. conversation with the discerning Scribe, "after 35-37. that durst ask Him any question"—that is, The End of Captious Questions. as Dr Morison remarks, "in a captious or argu- mentative way." It is necessary to make that differentiation. For it would be giving a totally false impression of our Lord to interpret this sentence as meaning that men who had honest questions to ask no longer felt they dared approach Him. It was to Jesus the man with honest doubts and genuine difficulties naturally appealed. He invited questions and questioners of that type and gave them gracious and satisfying answers. The illuminating character of His answer to the Scribe, and the kindly tone of it, far from frightening the man with real difficulties away, must have made him feel that Jesus was the one Person to whom he could take them

Mark xii. with the assurance of getting a helpful answer.
35-37. But as far as those men were concerned who made it their business to concoct cunning questions and propound dilemmas in order to catch Christ in His words, the series of colloquies of which this chapter tells had taken all the fight out of them. “No man after that durst ask Him any question.” We might have looked for some such sentence at the close of chapter eleven. The priests and elders might have recognised their defeat in the debate about authority. But love is not the only thing that makes people blind. Hate makes people blinder still. Hate made Christ’s enemies blind to every suggestion of Divine wisdom contained in His speech. To them He was simply the uncultivated teacher from Nazareth. It was absurd to think that they—the clever, cultivated people of the capital—could not gain a dialectical victory over Him. And so they returned again and again to the attack. Pharisees and Herodians followed the priests and the elders; the Sadducees followed the Pharisees and the Herodians. Priests, Pharisees, Herodians, Sadducees had all to be overwhelmed with shame and confusion before they could be persuaded that it was a hopeless enterprise to try to ensnare the Lord.

**A
Reluctant
Conviction.**

But the utter hopelessness of it dawned upon them at last. It was not that Jesus avoided the dilemmas they set for Him, but there was such a reach and a depth in the answer He gave. They were full of Divinest wisdom; He laid down

Great David's Greater Son

great principles which all who heard them ^{Mark xii.} recognised as containing the eternal truth. Every ^{35-37.} question submitted to Him became simply an opportunity for the revelation of some new aspect of His understanding and truth. Here was a Man Whose wisdom was equal to every difficulty ! Here was a Master of the mind Who had never to confess Himself puzzled or beaten ! At last, I say, Priests, Pharisees, Herodians, Sadducees, recognised that they had entered upon a hopeless contest. "No man after that durst ask Him any question."

All this naturally and inevitably suggests a ques- Who is
tion : Who and what was this man, Who spake as This?
never yet man spake ? Read through these collo-
quies again, note the ease and mastery which Jesus displays, notice above everything else His match-
less insight, His grasp of spiritual truth. Whence hath this man this wisdom ? Here are the clever and educated men on the one side, and there is Jesus of Nazareth on the other—and it is Jesus who shines forth as the Lord of Truth and the Light of men. How do you account for it ? I account for it by saying that God was in Christ and therefore that in Him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden.

After our Lord's conversation with the Scribe ^{Our Lord's} He seems to have resumed His teaching in the ^{Question.} Temple. A great multitude was listening to Him, and, as is quite evident from Matthew's account, His foes, though they durst not ask Him any more questions, were still there on the

St Mark x. 32—xiii. 37

Mark xii. watch for anything that they might be able to pick up and use against Him later on. Jesus saw them there, and in the course of His teaching He turned to them with a question of His own. They had been asking Him questions all the morning ; He will now ask them one. They had been testing His wisdom, He will now test theirs. He carries the war, so to speak, into the enemies' camp. For the full account of what happened, we must turn to Matthew's version (Matt. xxii. 41-45). Mark's account is abbreviated and compressed. The Pharisees were the people to whom Jesus specially addressed the question, and the question itself was this : "What think ye of the Christ ? Whose Son is He ?" "What do you think about the Messiah" ; that is, "whose son is He ?" And to these men learned in the law, brought up in the tradition of the elders the question seemed absurdly simple, and they replied glibly, like children repeating their catechism, "David's." "Then," retorted Jesus, "how is it that David, by inspiration, calls Him Lord" ? and with that He quoted some familiar verses from Psalm cx. : "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou on My right hand, till I make Thine enemies the footstool of Thy feet." If, then, David calls Him Lord, how is He his son ?

The Psalm
and its
Authorship.

Now it is necessary to say a word about certain difficulties which have been created by the verdict modern scholarship pronounces upon the Psalm Jesus here quotes. For it holds that David was not its author, and that our Lord's

Great David's Greater Son

argument therefore falls to the ground. But Mark xii. everybody of course knows that Psalms by various writers are included in the Psalter. The titles prefixed to the Psalm are by no means to be taken as sure guides to the authorship of them. Yet, even according to the titles, we have, in the Psalter, Psalms by Moses, and Asaph and Solomon, and the sons of Korah and Elhan. The Psalter as a whole, however, was generally spoken of as by "David." The Jews had a dislike of anonymity, and were wont, Dr David Smith says, to bring everything under the shadow of a great name, so they came to ascribe to David the great majority of the songs that gradually got gathered together into their Psalter. Psalm cx. is a case in point. Even so, how could our Lord use this argument? Let us see. Jesus is here disputing with the Pharisees. He meets them on their own ground ; He fights them with their own weapons: This Psalm according to Pharisaic belief was of Davidic authorship. It was also of Messianic purport. There were two fixed points in the thought of the Pharisees about this Psalm : David was the writer of it, and the great King Whose invincible prowess is the subject of it was "great David's greater son." Now our Lord is not here discussing the rights or wrongs of that belief. He is dealing with men on their own ground. And in arguing with them of course had to start from some position which they admitted. "You hold," Jesus says in effect to them, "that the Messiah is the Son of David. Now there is a

Our Lord's
Use of the
Psalm.

Mark xii. Psalm that you assert David wrote. In this
35-37. Psalm David calls Messiah ‘Lord.’ How do you
reconcile the two things ?” The argument so far
as those Pharisees are concerned to whom it was
originally addressed depends not upon the fact
that David was the author, but upon the fact that
they believed he was. And the truth Christ
seeks to inculcate by the quotation loses none of
its validity even though scholarship should prove
beyond cavil or dispute that David could not have
written it. That truth is that a merely human
conception of Messiah, the conception of Him, for
instance, as a Conquering Prince, does not cover
the Bible representation of Him. He is more
than human, He is Divine. He is more than
David’s Son, He is David’s Lord.

The
Pharisees
and the
Scriptures.

Now turning to the question itself, notice that
by means of it Christ does two things, He
convicts the Pharisees of a partial and imperfect
knowledge of their own Scriptures and He makes
an immense claim for Himself. First of all, Jesus
convicted the Pharisees of an imperfect acquaint-
ance with their own Scriptures. He turns the
tables upon his foes. They had tried to catch
Him in His words. They had tried to humiliate
Him in the eyes of the people. Now, by means
of this brief colloquy, He, in the presence of the
people, convicts them of ignorance of these very
Scriptures in which they professed themselves to
be expert. “What think ye of Christ ?” He asked.
“Whose Son is He ?” And they answered him,
like so many parrots, “David’s.” That is how

Great David's Greater Son

they had been brought up to think of Messiah. **Mark xii.** He was to be David's Son. He was to be one of 35-37. David's royal line. And He was to revive the ancient glories of David. He was to be a great King and to found a great Empire, and to give the Jews the place of supremacy amongst the nations of the earth. That was their notion of Messiah—it was materialistic, gross, earthly. The Messiah was to be David's Son. "But," said Jesus to them, "does not David say this of Him : 'The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou on My right hand, till I make Thine enemies the footstool of Thy feet.' " David himself calleth Him Lord. Whence is He his son ? "Your Bible," says Jesus to them, "speaks of a Messiah Who is much more than David's son—a prince of his royal line ; it speaks of a Messiah Who is in some wonderful way David's Lord." Jesus convicts them of a Where the partial reading of the Scriptures. They had come ^{Pharisees Erred.} to their Bibles with this preconceived notion in their minds. They were sure that the Messiah was to be a conquering Prince, and every passage that suggested anything different they ignored or passed by: The Jews could never have cherished their materialistic conceptions of Messiah and His work if they had honestly searched the Scriptures. What of this Psalm cx., where He is spoken of as David's Lord ? What of Isaiah liii., where He is spoken of as God's suffering servant? Passages like these did not enter into the Jewish calculations. And so it resulted that when Jesus came they refused to acknowledge Him ; and not only refused

Mark xii. to acknowledge Him, but they crucified the Lord
35-37. of Glory.

**Ourselves
and the
Scriptures.**

It is at our peril we become eclectics in the matter of Bible reading. And yet how prone we are to partial and imperfect reading of the Scriptures. There are multitudes to-day who emphasise every line that speaks of Christ's humanity ; but who strike out the passages that speak of Christ's Divinity. They want to see Christ as David's Son ; they do not want to see Him as David's Lord. And if we are not guilty of that particular partiality, yet there are many of us who pick and choose in other ways. We pick out the passages, for instance, that speak of God's compassion and neglect the passages that speak of God's holiness and righteousness ; we delight in the passages that speak of the infinite love of Christ, but we turn a blind eye to solemn verses like that which speaks of the "wrath of the Lamb." The temper is general. And yet a one-sided and partial reading of the Scriptures may have as disastrous effects in our case as it had in the case of these Pharisees. Indeed, is not the present limp and anæmic condition of our religious life, and especially our loss of the sense of sin, due to a partial reading of the Scriptures ? It is the nemesis of our emphasis upon divine love to the exclusion of holiness. Every Scripture is profitable ; and, in the interests not simply of truth, but of the religious life, neither ministers nor people must pick and choose,

Great David's Greater Son

but declare and receive "the whole counsel of Mark xii.
God."

35-37.

Then notice, in the second place, the great ^{David's Son} claim which Christ here makes for Himself. ^{and David's Lord.} They were looking for David's Son. Christ was David's Son according to the flesh, though, because He wore none of the trappings of royalty, the Pharisees had failed to recognise Him. But He was something infinitely greater than David's Son. He was David's Lord. The fault with the Pharisees was not that they had thought too highly of Messiah. They had not thought highly enough. The Messiah in their thought of Him was never anything but human. Jesus here declares Him to be Divine—so Divine that the great David hails Him as Lord. And in making this stupendous and staggering claim for Messiah, Jesus was making it for Himself. He had already done it this very week by riding in lowly triumph into Jerusalem, and by claiming authority over the Temple. The Pharisees therefore knew all that was implied in this word about David's Lord.

Now upon all this, I content myself with ^{The Great Claim.} making a couple of comments. And, first of all, this—in spite of every attempt to whittle away the Gospel narrative, the Jesus Whom the Gospels pourtray is a One Who makes the most amazing claims for Himself. You may leave the fourth Gospel entirely out of account but you cannot reduce Jesus to the dimensions of a simple unsophisticated Galilean teacher. He makes the

Mark xii. most astounding claims. He walks through the 35-37. pages of the Gospels—great, majestic, exalted—as One Who knew Himself the Son of God. You cannot eliminate these claims, for He and His claims are one. So that the old dilemma confronts us and we cannot escape it; either Jesus was what He claimed to be or He was both a deceiver and deceived. That is to say, you cannot sacrifice Christ's Divinity without sacrificing His goodness at the same time.

—And its
Justification.

The second is this—the character of Jesus justifies His regal claim. This Man Who spake as never man spake: this Man Who wrought such mighty works: this Man Whom death could not hold: this Man Who lived the sinless life: this Person Who occupies this unique and solitary place, Who exercises this unique and solitary power—I cannot find room for Him in the ordinary human categories. He is more than David's Son, He is David's Lord. He is more than my brother, He is my God. And because He is the Lord, He will win His triumph. Jesus was on His way to the Cross. The hour of darkness and seemingly utter defeat was close upon Him. But He looked beyond and saw the certain victory. He strengthened His own heart with this great word, "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou on My right hand [the place of authority and power] until I make Thine enemies the footstool of Thy feet." His enemies were to win no final triumph. Every enemy was to be put beneath His feet. And we may

Great David's Greater Son

hearten ourselves with the same word. If Jesus **Mark xii.**
were a mere Man—an everyday fallible human 35-37.
being—His cause might meet with defeat and
He Himself might be superseded. But amid
discouragements and disappointments and seem-
ing defeats, I remember He is David's Lord.
He is the mighty God, the Everlasting Father,
the Prince of Peace. And when I remember
that I feel I can trust and not be afraid. "The
Lord is my strength and song, and He is
become my salvation" (Ps. cxviii. 14).

XVII

THE GREAT INDICTMENT

“And He said unto them in His doctrine, Beware of the scribes, which love to go in long clothing, and love salutations in the market-places, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and the uppermost rooms at feasts : which devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers : these shall receive greater damnation.”—MARK xii. 38-40.

Mark xii.
38-40.
The Scribes
and the
Lord.

ALL throughout our Lord's career His Scribes and Pharisees had taken up an attitude of hostility against Him. From the very first they had criticised His actions, disputed His claims, and in every way tried to discredit Him in the eyes of the people. Neither the wisdom of Christ's words, nor the beneficence of His works stirred any feeling of wonder or appreciation in their breasts. Mr Prejudice, with his sixty deaf men, was in possession of every gate that led to the citadel of their souls. How inveterate was the prejudice, and how bitter the hate may be judged by the account they gave of His mighty works. “He hath Beelzebub,” they said, “and by the prince of the devils casteth He out devils.” It was the Galilean Scribes who in their blind and obstinate prejudice had said that wicked thing against the Lord. But the Jerusalem Scribes were of the same bigoted and bitter

The Great Indictment

temper. They saw no beauty in Christ that Mark xii. they should desire Him. In public, they con- 38-40. tinually tried to thwart Him in His work and to humiliate Him in the eyes of the people; in secret they constantly plotted His death. This day of questioning and debate had sufficiently displayed the spirit they were of. For Jesus knew, and probably the people knew also, that the questions which had been submitted to Him were prompted not by a genuine desire to know, but were the offspring of a malice and an envy and a hate that were as cruel as the grave.

And now, when the questionings were all over, Jesus turns to the crowd and speaks to them about the character of His questioners. In one of the most terrible and awesome passages, not only in Scripture but in the whole of literature, our Lord tears away the garb of sanctimoniousness and piety these rabbis wore, and revealed them for the hypocrites, the mummers, the play-actors they really were. I have wondered sometimes how these Scribes must have felt as Jesus went on with His searching and remorseless exposure of their hypocrisy. In Revelation vi. 15-17 we read of certain men who cry to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb." And I have imagined that these Scribes and Pharisees must have wished they could hide anywhere out of sight of those clear eyes that read their souls

The Lord
and the
Scribes.

Mark xii. like an open book, and out of hearing of those terrible words that fell upon their ears like the stroke of doom. It is the merest resumé of the Great Indictment that we get here. For the complete and detailed account of our Lord's denunciation of the Scribes you must turn to Matthew xxiii. From the account Matthew gives we know that our Lord piled up one solemn and terrible "woe" upon another—until the indictment became absolutely crushing and overwhelming. It is only the gist of that terrific speech that Mark gives us here, and we must read and interpret what Mark says in the light of Matthew's fuller narrative.

The Wrath of the Lamb.

But before we examine Christ's accusations against the Scribes, let us note that the chief interest and importance of this paragraph consists, not in the exposure it makes of the hypocrisy of the Scribes, but in the light it throws on the character of Jesus Himself. We see our Lord here in a strange aspect! This Man Who cries, "Woe unto you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites," is not like the "gentle Jesus" we sing about. There is something fierce, hot, scorching about the whole of this passage. What we get here is not the gentleness of Christ, but the *anger* of Christ. No! I withdraw that word *anger*. It carries with it just a suggestion of personal passion and pique. And there was no trace of personal temper in the whole of this tremendous indictment. The word for the burning, holy indignation of this passage is not anger but

The Great Indictment

wrath. The wrath of Christ! We do not often **Mark xii.** speak of it. Perhaps in our conceptions of Christ 38-40. we leave no room for it. And yet, my reading of the Gospels convinces me that Christ's wrath is as real as His love.

It is, indeed, impossible to exaggerate the **The Tenderness of Jesus** for Christ. tenderness of Jesus. Nothing could be more gentle and gracious than His treatment, for instance, of Jairus' little daughter; or of that poor timid soul who touched the hem of His garment in the press, and stole healing virtue from Him; nothing could be more exquisitely tender than His treatment of Zacchæus, and indeed the whole publican class; nothing could be more beautifully kind than His treatment of the weak but penitent Peter. But with all His kindness, and gentleness, and tenderness Christ was not soft. There is another and very different aspect to Christ's character. If you want to get **—And His Sternness.** the complete view of Christ's character you must read not only the story of how He welcomed publicans and sinners to Him—you must read also that other story of how He swept the Temple Courts clean of the mob of traffickers who bought and sold in its courts. If you want the complete view of Christ's character you must not only read the story of how He said to the outcast publican—Thou also art a Son of Abraham,—you must read also the story of how He cried out against the religious leaders of the day, saying, "Woe unto you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites." The wrath of Christ is as real as His love, and

St Mark x. 32—xiii. 37

Mark xii. room must be made for it in any conception of
38-40. the Christ that aspires to be complete.

—Its
Necessary
Place in His
Character.

I will go a step further and say that Christ's *wrath* is an element in the perfection of His character. We conspire to ignore it in these days under the mistaken idea that somehow or other it takes from the glory and perfection of Christ to suppose that He could be wrathful. On the contrary, it is the people who ignore the wrath who sacrifice the perfection of Christ. I will for ever refuse the epithet "good" to the man who is incapable of a holy flame of indignation in the presence of wrong and sin. The man who is never angry is morally anaemic. He is not good; he is weak. The father who can never be wrathful with his child, who weakly smiles at his child's wrong-doing, is not a "good" father, he is about as bad a father as a child could have. It is high time we revised our ideas of what goodness is and ceased to identify it with a weak and soft amiability. Christ's holy wrath is, then, an element in His perfection. He was no soft and weak sentimentalist as a great deal of current religious thought and speech make Him out to have been. He was holy as well as tender, He was entirely good.) In His passion for purity He flamed like a refiner's fire, and wicked men could not abide the day of His coming. That is the aspect of Christ we get here.

A Modern
Need.

There is scarcely anything we need more in these days than a quickened sense of the holiness

The Great Indictment

of our Lord and His sacred wrath against sin. *Mark xii.* We have lost the saving and purifying sense of 38-40. fear. "Nobody," as Dr Dale said to Dr Berry, "is afraid of God now." And as a result, the seriousness and the solemnity and the awe have passed out of our religious life. Religion has degenerated into an amiability—into ■ cheap optimism. There is nothing wrong—or if there is, everything and everybody will come all right and (as in the popular novel of the day) we are all going to be happy ever after. It would do us good to read a terrible passage like this upon our knees, that we may learn that the "wrath" of Christ is no figure of speech, and may acquire that godly fear which is the very beginning of wisdom.

And while this passage reminds us that we must make room for holy wrath as well as for love in our conception of Christ, so it reminds us that He is not simply Saviour—He is Judge as well. Am I wrong in saying that this again is an oft neglected aspect of the office and work of Christ? We are constantly talking about Jesus as Saviour. And we cannot talk too much. For the announcement of His Saviourhood is the very core of the good news we have to proclaim to the world. That is how Christ was first announced in the ears of men. "There is born unto you this day in the city of David a Saviour which is Christ the Lord." But that is not all. No one can read the New Testament without seeing that Christ is more than

Christ as
Saviour;
but Judge

St Mark x. 32—xiii. 37

Mark xii. Saviour, He is also Judge. The Father “hath committed all Judgment unto the Son” (John v. 22). Before Him all nations are to be gathered. By their attitude to Him men’s destinies are to be settled. Let us never forget that He Who wants to be our Saviour is certain to be our Judge.

Love on
Fire.

I should be giving a wrong impression of this passage if I made out it was all wrath and indignation. There is love in it as well, for the word “woe” which fell time after time from Christ’s lips, is an exclamation no less of pity than of condemnation. We speak of a thing as a “woeful pity.” And so one of the old Greek Fathers entitles this terrible passage “Christ’s Commiseration of the Scribes and Pharisees.” Even while pronouncing sentence upon them, He yearned over them with a great compassion. There is love in the very wrath of the Lord. There is a wistful pleading even in His indignation. His wrath, as someone has said, is but His love on fire.

Can Men
Speak as
Christ
Spoke ?

This paragraph raises another very interesting and important question, and that is this—how far is this terrible indictment of our Lord’s to be imitated by modern ministers in their preaching? I will content myself with just two words on this point. First of all, before we speak with the severity and directness of this great sermon, we ought to be able to read the human heart as Jesus did. He had ■ right to speak like this, for He knew what was in man; He

The Great Indictment

read the hearts of these Scribes like an open *Mark xii.* book. But for the rest of us, who do not thus *38-40.* know the heart, perhaps we had better recall the word of the Lord where He says, "Judge not, that ye be not judged." And yet, in the second place, we must remember that the Christian preacher is not set in his place to prophesy smooth things. He is set in his place to declare the truth—even when the truth is bitter, unpalatable and painful. His duty is not merely to denounce sin in general terms; he must also, when occasion demands, rebuke the sinner; he must dare to say to him, with the plain, remorseless severity of the old Book, "Thou art the man."

And now let us look at the accusation itself. The Sins
Denounced: The Scribes, remember, were the religious teachers of the Jews—they were, as we should say, the ministers of that day. Look at the charges Jesus brings against these men who paraded as the ministers of God. He accuses them of *ostentation*—Ostenta-
tion and
Pride. *and pride.* They walked about, as Dr Salmond says, in stately, flowing robes, like those of kings and priests. They were all eagerness to have salutations in the market-places, *i.e.* to have sounding titles like *Rabbi* addressed to them in public. They liked also to have the chief seats in the synagogue—the seats or benches, Dr Salmond explains, reserved for the elders, in front of the ark and facing the people. They were sticklers for order of precedence. They insisted upon their dignity. But pride and

Mark xii. 38-40. **Avarice.** ostentation were not the chief sins of the Scribes. They were also guilty of *avarice*. "They devoured widows' houses," says our Lord. For they were lawyers as well as religious teachers. Necessarily they would be used for the making of wills and other legal business. And they used the opportunity their legal position gave them to enrich themselves at the expense of the poor and the defenceless. Dr David Smith reminds us that in pre-reformation times, it was a custom in our own land, when a peasant died, for the priest to visit the stricken dwelling not to comfort the widow and the orphans but to claim the "cors-present"—the best cow and the coverlet of the bed or the deceased's outer garment. And the Scribes were guilty of ■ similar rapacity so that one great Rabbi could say about the impoverishment of ■ certain widow, "The stroke of the Pharisees has touched you." And our Lord's indignation waxed hot against these false shepherds who, instead of caring for the defenceless sheep of their charge, harried and rent them.

—**Hypocrisy.** But even avarice was not their blackest and deepest crime. Their wickedness culminated in this, "for a pretence they made long prayers." In other words, although they were the religious teachers of Judæa, their religion was all a sham. Their piety was all a parade and a pretence. They were—to use the word, which, according to Matthew's account, Jesus again and again applied to them—hypocrites, mummers, make-believes,

The Great Indictment

play-actors. And they adopted this cloak of Mark xii. piety in order that under the shadow of it, they 38-40. might the more easily practise the wickedness to which they were in their hearts addicted. So we may take this terrible indictment as Christ's condemnation of the religious sham.

There are no Scribes or Pharisees in these Our own days of ours, but the sin which called down upon Scribes and Pharisees this stern indictment exists still. The religious pretender, the counterfeit Christian is alive still. Indeed it will profit us all in face of this great indictment to fall on our knees and ask, Is it I? Is it the substance of religion we have or only the shadow of it? Are we good coin or base metal? Do we do the will or do we simply say, "Lord, Lord"? And this is our Lord's condemnation of those who are religious simply to please men. I ought to withdraw that word *religious* and say those who make a show of religion in order to please men. That is what the Scribes and Pharisees did; they gave their alms and offered their sacrifices and said their prayers to be seen of men. And there is a parade of religion which men and women still adopt in order to be respectable. Society around them may demand a certain amount (not too much) and a certain type of religion. And so they go to Church—because it is the correct thing—to be seen of men, not to hold fellowship with God. And this terrible sermon is our Lord's condemnation and repudiation of that miserable conventional

Mark xii. religion. It is also His stern condemnation of those who make religion a cloak for wrongdoing. "The man who lives for avarice and ambition has his condemnation. But the man who does this under the cover of a loud religious profession has greater condemnation still." These scribes made their long prayers a means of devouring widow's houses the more easily. They turned religion into an instrument of wickedness.

"The
Greater
Condem-
nation."

"These shall receive greater condemnation"—greater than that of the open, avowed, and notorious sinner. Greater than that of the publicans and harlots and sinners whom these Scribes cast out. It is a singular thing that Christ's sternest words were reserved not for the open and notorious sinners but for the hypocrites, the sinners who wore the mask of goodness. Sham religion, false goodness was, in our Lord's eyes, worse than open badness, and it would receive "greater condemnation." None of us is likely to be reckoned amongst the publicans and sinners! But it is possible some of us may fall under the condemnation of these Scribes.

Tests.

Is our religion real, genuine, true? There are two or three tests which it will profit us to apply to our religion. Here is one—"Let everyone that nameth the name of the Lord depart from unrighteousness" (2 Tim. ii. 19). Here is another—"By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John xiii. 35). Here is yet a third—"Every one that hath this hope

The Great Indictment

set on him purifieth himself, even as He is Mark xii. pure" (1 John iii. 3). Here is yet a fourth—38-40. "Pure religion and undefiled before our God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world" (James i. 27). Do we satisfy the tests?

XVIII

THE WIDOW'S MITES

"And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And He called unto Him His disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: for all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living."—MARK xii. 41-44.

**Mark xii.
41-44.
A Moving
Contrast.**

THE change from the terrific sermon in which our Lord denounced "woe" upon Scribes and Pharisees, to this exquisite story of the widow and her offering, is like the change from the fury of a day of storm to the quiet beauty of a summer evening. When I read through the "Great Indictment" I seem to hear the roar of the thunder and to see the flash of the lightnings of Sinai; when I read Christ's eulogy upon the widow and her humble gift, I seem to be led into the green pastures and by the still waters. It is a welcome change—from the judgments to the commendations of the Lord; and to none, perhaps, so welcome as to Christ Himself. I think it was Moody who used to say that no one should preach about hell and the judgment without

The Widow's Mites

tears. The man who can talk about the judgment without deep and overpowering emotion has not yet learned of Christ. May we not detect the breaking pain of the Lord's heart in these tremendous woes? It must have cost Him something to utter them. And at the very end of the sermon love broke out in one last despairing cry against judgment. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem," He cried, "how often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" For judgment was Christ's "strange work." "I came," He says, "not to judge the world, but to save the world" (John xii. 47).

But if judgment was Christ's "strange" work, ^{The} He delighted in kind words and loving speech. ^{Loving-} You remember the antithesis in our familiar hymn, ^{Kindness of} our Lord. "Slow to chide . . . swift to bless"—that is it exactly. Christ was slow to blame, but quick to praise. Slow to expose and denounce men's sin but quick to see and to praise any good that was in them. I remember that in the obituary notices of the late Mr M'Connell, the presiding magistrate of the London Session, this was said about him, and I thought it was about as fine a thing as could be said about any man holding a position like his. You know that after a prisoner has been convicted, the police bring up all his past history, and if he has been in the hands of the law before, every previous conviction is mentioned to the judge. But Mr M'Connell was never satisfied with hearing merely the evil about a man. When the

Mark xii. police had made their report, he used to turn to the prisoner and say, "Now, tell us something good about yourself." And that was the very spirit of Jesus. He had no pleasure in exposing and denouncing men's evil deeds, but He had the keenest delight in discovering something good about them. It was a bit of genuine, unaffected goodness he saw in the poor widow and her gift. And how He delighted in it! For our Lord's was that loving heart that rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth with the truth.

Christ at the Treasury.

Let us now turn to the story itself as Mark tells it. It was in the Court of the Gentiles that Jesus had run the gauntlet of all those cunningly concocted questions and had ended up by pronouncing that tremendous philippic against the Scribes and Pharisees. After that terrific sermon there could of course be no possible reconciliation between Him and them. And so Jesus, leaving the crowd to wrangle about His words and His Person, proceeded to quit the temple for ever. Their house was verily left unto them desolate. But before passing finally out, He made His way into the Court of the Women, and just as in His weariness He had sat down by Jacob's well to rest, so now spent and worn by all the excitement and emotion of the preceding hours, He sat down to rest for a brief space on the steps that led up to the women's court. Now in the Colonnades that surrounded this court there were thirteen boxes called shopheroth or "trumpets" because they were shaped like trumpets, swelling

The Widow's Mites

out beneath and tapering upward into a narrow mouth or opening. They were set there to receive the offerings of worshippers for the support of the temple services. And as Jesus sat on the steps leading to the Court He had these offering boxes in full view.

Very soon his attention was drawn to the conduct of the crowd of worshippers as they passed these boxes. "He beheld," or more exactly, "he was beholding," He was deliberately observing, how the crowd of people cast money into the treasury. A man's attitude towards the collecting box is a very fair index of character. Goethe tells a story of Lavater that one day, when it was his business to hold the bag for worshippers to drop in their coins as they left the Church, he resolved that without looking into the faces of the givers he would watch their hands. He thought that the very manner in which people dropped their gifts into the bag would tell him something about the characters of the people, and many was the interesting conclusions he had to communicate to Goethe when it was all over.

Our Lord anticipated Lavater. He sat watching how the people cast their gifts into the treasury, watching with interest their manner as they drew near the "trumpets" and made their offerings. He saw that many of the rich kept casting in much, With a certain ostentation they put a handful of coins into the trumpets. But somehow or other these large gifts did not call forth Christ's admiration. Perhaps He saw

—And Their
Offerings.

St Mark x. 32—xiii. 37

Mark xii. that they gave their many coins, as they said
41-44. their long prayers, for to be seen of men. But
The Poor by and by as He watched, His attention was
Widow. rivetted as Edersheim puts it, by one solitary figure. Mark's description of her is at once vivid and pathetic. And there came "one pauper widow;" she came, as Edersheim says, "alone," as if ashamed to mingle with the crowd of rich givers, ashamed to have her offering seen, perhaps ashamed to bring it; a "widow," in the garb of a desolate mourner, her condition, appearance, bearing, that of a "pauper." Our Lord's attention was drawn to her, and He watched her. She held in her hands "two Perutahs"—two "mites" as our version puts it—the smallest of Jewish coins—a "perutah" being about an eightieth part of a denarius or shilling. Ten mites would be needed, Dr Salmond says, to make an English penny. She had these coins in her hand. Shyly and timidly she dropped them into one of the "trumpets" and then hurried away as if ashamed of the meagreness of it all.

**The World's
Judgment
Reversed.**

But our Lord knew what those two mites meant to that solitary pauper widow, and calling His disciples to Him He said, "Verily I say unto you, this poor widow cast in more than all they which are casting into the treasury, for they all did cast in of their superfluity: but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living." The widow's two mites, said Jesus, formed the greatest gift put into the treasury that day. They outweighed the silver and the gold

The Widow's Mites

the rich cast in. It was a complete and total **Mark xii.** reversal of the world's judgment. "There are 41-44. last which shall be first," said Jesus, "and there are first which shall be last," and this eulogy upon the widow woman and her gift is an illuminating commentary upon that text.

Now, turning to the lessons the story has to Christ and teach, notice first of all, Christ's unerring eye ^{the Lowly in Heart.} for modest, unobtrusive and humble goodness. His denunciations of the Scribes showed that loud profession could not deceive Him: His commendation of this pauper widow shows that shy and retiring goodness cannot escape Him. And it is this latter quality that endears Christ to us. There is something terrifying in the thought of those clear eyes which pierce through all pretences and excuses. But there is something cheering and comforting in the thought of those eyes that never miss an act of genuine kindness and piety however humble. The Bible makes a great deal of the minuteness of God's care and attention. Not a sparrow falls to the ground without Him. He counts the very hairs of our head. And the minuteness of God's attention and care comes out specially in this, that He has eyes not simply for men of great and outstanding powers and services, but also for those quiet, humble, lowly folk whom the world never notices, and who never get their names into the newspapers. "This poor man cried," says one of the Psalmists, "and the Lord heard him" (Psalm xxxiv. 6). "I am poor and needy," cries another, "yet the Lord thinketh upon me"

St Mark x. 32—xiii. 37

Mark xii. (Psalm xl. 17). That is it! Not one is overlooked and forgotten. Cornelius was an officer amongst the troops in Cæsarea—a man of no great station or influence. But in his own quiet and humble way he tried to serve God. And God had not overlooked him. “Thy prayers and thine alms,” said the angel to him, “are gone up for a memorial before God” (Acts x. 14). Nathaniel was a humble Galilean provincial who waited for the consolation of Israel. Jerusalem knew nothing of him; the chief priests had never heard his name; but God knew all about his piety and his prayer. “When thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee” (John i. 48). And in exactly the same way our Lord was quick to notice the piety and devotion of this poor widow’s act. No one else in the Temple recognised it. The attendant priest, and even our Lord’s disciples had eyes only for the rich men and their large gifts, but our Lord had respect unto the lowly.

Heaven’s
Standard of
Values.

Another lesson I gather from the story—a lesson as to heaven’s standard of values. The widow’s two mites, from one point of view, was the smallest offering cast into the treasury that day. Indeed this was the very least offering which was allowed by the Rabbinical rules. On the other hand some of the rich men cast in much—as we should say, they put silver and gold upon the plate. And yet from our Lord’s point of view the widow’s mite constituted the biggest gift put into the treasury that day. He picked up the widow’s farthing and the rich man’s

The Widow's Mites

sovereign and He said the farthing was the bigger **Mark xii.** gift. "She hath given," He said, "more than 41-44. they all." The disciples for a moment looked bewildered, and then our Lord proceeded to show how a farthing could be better than a sovereign—in other words He proceeded to state heaven's measure of values. "Every one else," He said, "put in something from what he had to spare, while she, in her need, put in all she had—everything she had to live on." Which being translated into a general principle amounts to this—Heaven measures our gifts and our services by *the amount of self-sacrifice involved in them.*

The rich men cast in their gold; but they never missed what they gave. They had not to deny themselves a single luxury. They had not to give up anything. They had not to dress in cheaper clothes or keep a plainer table. They had not, as a result, to do without anything. But it was otherwise with the poor widow. Her two mites made little difference to the amount of the collection. But it made a vast difference to her. It meant giving up her bite of bread, or drop of milk, or morsel of honey for that day. It was all she had to live upon until she worked for more. And so heading the list of subscriptions for that day there comes not the name of any of the eminent Rabbis, or proud Sadducees, or rich merchants of Jerusalem, but the name of this poor widow who gave a farthing. The amount of sacrifice involved in it decides the value of a gift in heaven's sight.

St Mark x. 32—xiii. 37

Mark xii.
41-44.
A Warning
Note.

Now I find a double lesson in all this. I find a suggestion of warning in it. I begin to wonder how much our gifts and services are worth in heaven's sight, measured by this standard. How much genuine sacrifice is there in them? Like the disciples, we take a very mechanical and materialistic view of things. We measure gifts by their amount. It is almost inevitably so. And I frankly confess that the gold, and the bank-note and the cheque are exceedingly welcome. But this incident teaches us that Christ not only *counts* our offering, He *weighs* it. He weighs it to see what amount of sacrifice is in it. In a way there is no more curious perversion and misuse of a text, than the misuse people make of this Scripture about the widow's mite. People are asked for a gift to some branch of Christian work and they say, "Well, I'll give you my mite." And by that they mean they will give a little. But this widow's mite was not a little. It was everything she had, it was all her living. If only people gave after the pattern of this poor widow our religious treasuries would be full to overflowing. With this story before me, I suggest that we should go honestly over our subscription lists and ask ourselves what our Lord thinks about them? I dare say from the human standpoint they look sufficient, perhaps even generous. But how do they look from heaven's standpoint? Is there real sacrifice in them? Or do we simply give to the Lord that which costs us nothing?

The Widow's Mites

The other lesson is one of encouragement. *Mark xii.* our Lord knows exactly the value of even a 41-44. small gift. It is accepted, Paul says, according as a man hath and not according as he hath not. So long as there is genuine sacrifice in the gift, we need not worry about the amount. And there is often, as in this case, much more sacrifice in the smaller than the larger offerings. We have generous gifts to our Missionary Society for instance. But there is one servant girl who out of hard-earned wages brings me a half-crown for the work of Christ in foreign lands. I have often wondered whether in our Lord's sight hers is not the largest subscription of all. At any rate let us lay this comfort to our heart, that if only we do our *best*, if there is genuine sacrifice in our gifts, even though the world thinks them meagre and beneath notice, Jesus marks, understands, and estimates aright.

Another lesson the story suggests to me is *The Gift and the Love behind it.* this, that the acceptability of a gift depends upon the love that is in it. The poor widow was the only one who made sacrifices that day. Measured by sacrifice it was the largest of all the gifts offered to the treasury. But what prompted the sacrifice? Love. And while the sacrifice made the gift large, love made it acceptable. People cast in their offerings from various motives. Some of the rich men put their gold in to gain credit and glory with men. Others put their offerings in as a matter of usage and convention. But this poor widow gave her

Mark xii. two mites "for love." For there was no law compelling her to give. And the Temple treasury was not like so many religious treasuries of to-day—in dire and urgent need. This "poor widow" might very well have passed the "trumpets" by. But, as a matter of fact, her heart was overflowing with love to God. Hers was a hard lot and yet she felt God had been inexpressibly good to her. And the best she had to offer was but a poor return for all His goodness to her. So out of sheer gratitude and devotion she gave her all—all she had to live upon. And that was what made the gift acceptable and dear to God. "Her heart went with her two mites." And this lesson is one which again we need to lay to heart. It is *love* God wants and our gifts are only acceptable as love prompts them. We do a lot of giving in various ways. But am I wrong in thinking that sometimes it is more than a trifle grudging? We part with our subscription with a grumble, and sometimes the poor collector has a rather hard time of it. I wonder how much the gift is worth in God's sight? The Lord loveth a cheerful giver. "The gift without the giver is bare."

No Praise—
but Remem-
brance.

You will notice that not a word passed between our Lord and this pauper widow. She did not know that Christ's eyes were upon her. She did not know that He had noticed her gift. She never knew of this eulogy that Christ pronounced upon her to His disciples. You may think if

The Widow's Mites

you like that there was a great joy in her heart, Mark xii. that there was sunshine in her soul as she left 41-44. the Temple that day. But of earthly recognition there was none. Even our Lord refused to mar the pure devotion and sacrifice of her gift by a word of praise. "His silence was a tryst for heaven," says Edersheim. But the fragrance of this deed of hers, like the fragrance of Mary's alabaster box, has remained in the Church all down the centuries. And when she reached the Father's house she got her rich reward. These two mites had transmuted themselves into the unfading riches.

The ultimate reward of all loving and ^{The Sure} sacrificial service is still sure. Though the ^{Reward.} world may take no notice, the record of all faithful loving service is kept in heaven. Every offering of love is down in the Lamb's Book of Life. Acts as simple and lowly as this widow's gift, acts which had passed clean out of mind and memory, will be recalled to us then, and Christ will say, "Inasmuch as ye did it to the least of one of these, ye did it unto Me."

XIX

THE LAST THINGS

“ And as He went out of the Temple, one of His disciples saith unto Him, Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here ! And Jesus answering said unto him, Seest thou these great buildings ? There shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. And as He sat upon the Mount of Olives over against the Temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked Him privately, Tell us, when shall these things be ? and what shall be the sign when all these things shall be fulfilled ? And Jesus answering them began to say, Take heed lest any man deceive you : for many shall come in My name, saying, I am Christ ; and shall deceive many. And when ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars, be ye not troubled : for such things must needs be ; but the end shall not be yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom : and there shall be earthquakes in divers places, and there shall be famines and troubles : these are the beginnings of sorrows. But take heed to yourselves : for they shall deliver you up to councils ; and in the synagogues ye shall be beaten : and ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for My sake, for a testimony against them. And the gospel must first be published among all nations. But when they shall lead you, and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate : but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye : for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost. Now the brother shall betray the brother to death, and the father the son ; and children shall rise up against their parents, and shall cause them to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for My name’s sake : but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. But when ye shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet,

The Last Things

standing where it ought not (let him that readeth understand), then let them that be in Judæa flee to the mountains : and let him that is on the house-top not go down into the house, neither enter therein, to take anything out of his house : and let him that is in the field not turn back again for to take up his garment. But woe to them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days ! And pray ye that your flight be not in the winter. For in those days shall be affliction, such as was not from the beginning of the creation which God created unto this time, neither shall be. And except that the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh should be saved : but for the elect's sake, whom He hath chosen, He hath shortened the days. And then if any man shall say to you, Lo, here is Christ ; or, lo, He is there ; believe him not : for false Christs and false prophets shall rise, and shall shew signs and wonders, to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect. But take ye heed : behold, I have foretold you all things. But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light. And the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. And then shall He send His angels, and shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven. Now learn a parable of the fig tree ; When her branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is near : so ye in like manner, when ye shall see these things come to pass, know that it is nigh, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, That this generation shall not pass, till all these things be done. Heaven and earth shall pass away : but My words shall not pass away. But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. Take ye heed, watch and pray : for ye know not when the time is. For the Son of Man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore : for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning : lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch."—MARK xiii. 1-end.

Mark xiii. It was as Jesus and His disciples were passing out of the Temple that the colloquy took place with which this chapter opens. "Teacher," said one of His disciples, "look what fine stones and buildings these are!" And Jesus replied, "Do you see these great buildings? Not a single stone will be left here upon another which shall not be thrown down." That solemn word must have sounded like the stroke of doom in the ears of the disciples. For they were Jews, and to them as to every Jew the Temple was the holiest place on earth. I can quite imagine that all conversation was silenced by that tragic word. It was in an awed quietness they crossed the Kidron, and set their faces towards that steep path across the Mount of Olives which was to lead them to their evening's rest in Bethany.

At the top of the ascent Jesus paused and sat down to rest, with the Temple whose destruction He had just predicted full in His view. What His thoughts were as He gazed at it in its glory who shall tell? But taking advantage of the few moments of rest, four of His disciples came to Him to ask questions about the solemn prediction He had uttered a few minutes before. Peter and James and John and Andrew approach Him. Doubtless they acted on this particular occasion as representatives of the Twelve. There may have been something so rapt and exalted and awe-inspiring about the very appearance of Jesus that no individual disciple durst ask Him any question.

The Last Things

Four of them therefore approached our Lord **Mark xiii.** together, and those four the four chiefest **i-end.** and most influential of the Twelve Apostles. **The Questions of the Four.** They came to Him privately (*i.e.* apart from the rest of the Twelve) and asked Him, "Tell us, when shall these things be, and what shall be the sign when these things are all about to be accomplished?" It was the prophesied destruction of the Temple they had in mind, and they wanted to know two things—when that destruction would take place, and what warning would be given them when that destruction was near.

There were other and better questions they —**And the Questions they might have put.** might have asked, says Dr Glover. They might, for instance, have asked, "Why? Why must all these things be?" They might have asked their Lord to unfold to them the sin which necessitated so stern a judgment. They might have asked Him humbly what it was in the conduct of their nation that had provoked so awful a doom. Or they might have put yet another question—"How can this doom be averted?" and that perhaps would have been the best question of all. I should have thought better of the disciples if, in face of this stern and solemn word, they had felt sufficient concern for their nation to make them ask their Lord if there were no way of arresting and averting judgment. Abraham entreated the Lord for corrupt and pagan Sodom; could not these disciples have entreated Him for their own countrymen and

Mark xiii. for Jerusalem their Holy City ? But curiosity, or personal concern, was apparently the dominant feeling in their minds, and the only question they asked was about the date and the sign. It was in answer to that question that, according to Mark's account, our Lord uttered the great eschatological discourse which occupies the rest of the chapter.

The Double Catastrophe.

I designedly refrain from discussing the critical questions raised by this chapter. Our aim is mainly devotional and personal ; the critical difficulties in no way impair the solemn message of these words to ourselves. Looking broadly at this discourse of our Lord we can see that there are two horizons in it—the one near, the other far. There are two “ends” in it—the end of Jerusalem and the end of the world. The first “end” dated for that generation ; the other “not yet.” And though the disciples interpreted all these sayings as if they referred to one “end” only ; they yet reported them so faithfully that we with our clearer insight can distinguish between them. Judgments may vary about single verses, but roughly speaking vv. 3-8, 14-23, 28-31 seem to refer to the fall of Jerusalem ; the rest of the chapter refers to the end of the world. But in speaking about the counsel Jesus gives to His disciples, in view of the coming judgment, whether I gather my lessons from the verses that refer to the nearer or the remoter coming makes no difference as far as their spiritual validity is concerned.

The Last Things

"When shall these things be? and what shall Mark xiii. be the sign when these things are all about to end. be accomplished," asked the disciples. And Preparation for Jesus in answering them, instead of fixing the Judgment date, said, "Take heed that no man lead you astray." At first it sounds irrelevant. As a matter of fact there is a profound lesson in it. It is as if Christ said, "Date-fixing is not your concern. That is in God's hands. Your business is to take heed to yourselves, to do your own duty faithfully and well." The best way, then, of preparing for the Lord's coming is to work day by day with two hands earnestly as unto the Lord and not unto men. We have not got over our curiosity about dates even yet. Some people pore over the pages of the prophet Daniel and puzzle their brains about the number of the beasts in Revelation—thinking that from these passages they may discover the date when the Lord will come back. It is a futile task. The day and the hour God has kept within His own authority.

But, if you really want to prepare for the —By Lord's coming, I can tell you how to do it: "Carrying On." "Take heed to yourselves." Attend faithfully to your own duty and task. You remember the old and familiar story about the American legislature. They were in the midst of a debate when a deep and appalling darkness spread over the sky, until one member could not see another's face. In that darkness as of night strong men were seized with panic. They cried that the

Mark xiii. day of judgment was come. They wanted to adjourn the sitting and to betake themselves to prayer. Then one man got up and said, “Whether it be the day of judgment I know not: but one thing I do know, that it is the will of God that we should save our country. Mr Speaker, I move that candles be brought in, and that we proceed with the business.” Surely he was right. “How would a man rather be found than just doing the work which his Lord had committed to him?” Was it not John Wesley, who, when asked how he would spend the day if he knew it was his last, replied that he would just go through with the programme of preaching and visiting and travelling arranged for him and then quietly lay himself down to rest at night? That is the best way to prepare for the judgment. Leave your star-gazing and your date-fixing. Take heed to yourselves. Do your appointed task faithfully.

“O happy servant he,
In such a posture found!
He shall his Lord with rapture see,
And be with honour crowned.”

—By Steadfastness.

And that we may be found in that “happy posture,” bravely and faithfully doing our appointed task, there are two qualities we shall need. One is Stedfastness. “He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.” The endurance here spoken of is not, as the commentators tell us, the passive virtue of

The Last Things

patience, in our sense of bearing things without **Mark xiii.** murmur or resistance; but the manlier and **i-end.** more positive grace of perseverance or stedfastness. Josephus, Dr Salmond says, uses this word to describe the indomitable constancy of the heroes of the Maccabean struggle. It is a positive and energetic grace. It is courage that cannot be broken. And we shall want that grace if we —**A Needed Grace.** For the Christian life is not an easy life. Look at the troubles that were in front of these disciples. They were to be delivered up to councils, and beaten in synagogues and set before kings. Their nearest and dearest would rise up against them and plot their death. They would have to face the hatred and contempt of a world. To be faithful to Christ these first disciples needed an unflinching and steadfast courage. And though the forms in which the hatred of the world expresses itself have changed —the Christian life remains a hard life, a difficult life, an arduous life. Whoso would live it needs the high gift of courage. For it is not enough to have loved Christ once and served Him once! It is not enough to have made a beginning! It is not what we were years ago, but what we are at the moment of Christ's coming that matters. Men who started well like Judas and Demas ended their career amongst the castaways. If we are to be ready for the "Coming" we want stedfast courage. Courage, not only to begin, but that finer courage that spite of all

St Mark x. 32—xiii. 37

Mark xiii. difficulties bears up and presses on; for it is I-end. he who endureth to the end who shall be saved.

—By
Watchful-
ness.

Secondly, we need the grace of watchfulness. "Watch, therefore," says Christ, for "ye know not when the Lord of the house cometh." And He ends the discourse by repeating the warning, "What I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch." "The price of liberty," said Burke in a notable and familiar sentence, "is eternal vigilance." It is the price of salvation as well. We must be eternally alert, watchful, vigilant. For we may fail in our Christian life not simply through cowardice but also through presumption. We may flatter ourselves that all is well with us and so let down our guard that at the very time when we were saying peace and safety sudden destruction may come upon us. That was the trouble with the disciples in the garden—not cowardice but presumption. Instead of watching they slept, and so their enemies got them unawares. You remember where John Bunyan leaves Presumption—in a bottom chained by the heels. Over-confidence may result in the Lord when He comes finding us sleeping. So that if on the one hand we need to pray to be delivered from weakness and fear, on the other hand we need to pray this further prayer, "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins. Let them not have dominion over me" (Psalm xix. 13). Over-confidence may be as fatal as cowardice. "What I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch."

The Last Things

This is a chapter about the Lord's Return. Mark xiii. The disciples were most anxious about the date ^{1-end.} of it. Jesus was most anxious that they should be ready to welcome Him whenever He did come. And that is what really matters—that whenever the Lord comes we should be ready to receive Him.

I believe in what is technically known as the Second Coming of Christ. I believe that He will come back again to take His power and to reign. But I never trouble myself to ask when that coming will take place. There is another coming that may be nearer far. For Christ comes to the individual soul in death. And when that day and hour may be we cannot tell. But I do not know that this matters. The question is, are we ready to meet Him whenever He comes? Are we watching for Him? Are we stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord? Are we bravely, faithfully doing our task? If so, all's well. We shall be amongst those who love His appearing. Suppose the message reached us, "Behold, I come quickly," what would our answer be? Happy the man who can say back, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

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